HOWARD LAYS EGG!

#38

FOWL GENIUS –
STEVE GERBER
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TO LADY & THE TRAMP
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TALKS OF OLD TIMES

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FROM CREATURE COMMANDOS TO MOONSHADOW

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

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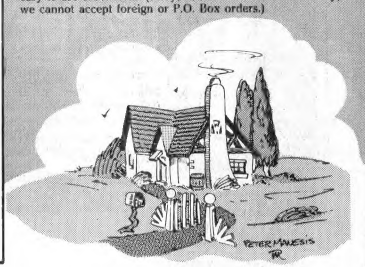

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CREDITS

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S
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DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT
editor/publisher

conceived by:
JIM SALICRUP
editorial and design consultant

MARK BORAX
managing editor

DARREL L. BOATZ
associate editor

SHEL DORF
KEN JONES
DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN
contributing editors

RICK WHO?
typesetting

BILL BLACK
BRUCE BRISTOW
DONNA JONES
CAROL KALISH
T. LIGAMARI
PEGGY MAY
FLOYD NORMAN
ED O'NEAL
STEVE SAFFEL
PETER SOREL
BRIAN TALLEY
special thanks

MARTIN W. HERZOG
canadian spy

L'BEAST d'PEEPS
well-heeled editor

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Art: Jim Salicrup

UP FRONT

Moving along the publishing pipeline in my tradesecret-busting series on the direct sales industry, our next stop is the retailer. Often, although not always, the retailer is a small scale independent operator who is supplied by a distributor on a non-returnable basis.

To be said in favor of retailers, they have to **guess** how many copies of a comic they can sell (since they'll be stuck with them if they don't sell) — so they truly put their money where their mouth is.

To be said against them, retailers have to **guess** how many copies of a comic they can sell — and since they're stuck with any unsold copies, they are often erratic and irrational, like the system itself, swinging wildly from one extreme to the other.

This results in lemming-like behavior, in which they all over order, say, DAZZLER #1 and, in the parlance, "eat them." Or similar but opposite myopia, in which they all order far too few of DARK KNIGHT #1.

Gosh, by now you'd think they'd be able to guess better.

-David

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"The HOWARD movie is not a total depar-

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STEVE GERBER

My first memory of Steve Gerber date back to the early '70s on one of my trips to New York City before I broke into the comic-book business. I was staying with David Kraft and he took me over to the office of Mad Genius Associates, a company he had formed with Jim Salicrup, where I met Steve. The topic of conversation that evening was the "Howard For President" theme that was running in the comic book, and of the Howard campaign button by Berni Wright-

ture from the comic book by any means."

son (produced by M.G.A.) which had recently been issued. I remember telling him that a lot of fans were ordering multiple copies of the button. He expressed amazement over the fact that they would regard the button as a valuable collectors' item. Whether or not it is, I still have mine.

I broke into the business not too long after that, just as Steve was finding himself being pushed out. One of my most vivid memories of that period was a series of late-night calls from Steve (now in California) in which, because of crushing deadline pressure, he had to dictate to me the script for the HOWARD THE DUCK newspaper strip. In the age before computers with modems and such near-instant electronic information transfer (not really all that long ago), it was a long and laborious process that went far to enrich the coffers of New York Telephone.

Years have passed and now Steve is a well-established writer and editor of animated stories, the topic of the first part of this interview which ran in last month's COMICS INTERVIEW. Yet Steve maintains his contact with mainstream comics and continually tries to write for them, only to meet with spectacular disappointments. But then, if things had always gone right in Steve's life, we might never have had the duck...

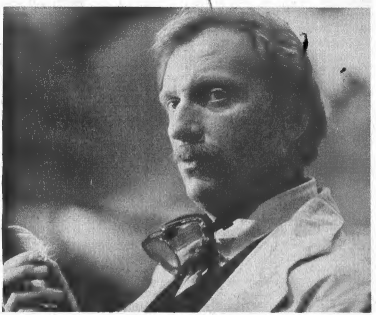
DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN: *How did you hear of George Lucas' plans to do a HOWARD THE DUCK movie?*

STEVE GERBER: Well, at the time that I first heard about the movie, **George Lucas** was not at that point yet involved with it. At about the same time as the settlement of the lawsuit occurred, I heard that **Willard Huyck** and **Gloria Katz** were trying to sell a picture based on the character and that Universal was interested. They were working with another producer at that time. They had written a script and were showing it around to the various studios. It was at that point that I actually first heard of it and became sort of involved with it. I had a meeting with them almost, it seems — my time sense is probably off here — but it seems like it was within weeks or even days, or months or something, right after the lawsuit had been settled. We talked about the character. We talked about their plans for the film. They were trying to feel me out, I think, on what it would be like to work with me. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *Why? Had they talked to some Marvel people beforehand?*

STEVE: Logical question, but no. I think it's because anytime they're going to adapt a property to the screen they know they're going to have to make certain changes in it and they are always wary of working with

Above: Lea Thompson plays Howard's punk paramour Beverly — a bit different from Steve's original Bev, eh? Below: Jeffrey Jones, as the pre-possessed Dr. Walter Jenning.



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"Some things that look interesting in a

BOY, PESSIMISM MUST BE YOUR RELIGION--MY UNCLE LEE GAVE YOU TIME OFF FROM YOUR TAXI JOB, THIS TRIP ISN'T COSTING US A CENT, AND WE'RE ALONE TOGETHER...HOWARD?
JUST CHECKING OUT THE STORM, TOOTS, IT'S REALLY COMING DOWN!

"Not everything can be played exactly the same way on the screen as it can on a static comic-book page," says Steve. Above: the Mantlo/Buscema/Janson version of Cleveland's best-dressed couple. Opposite: Lucas & Universal's version.

the creator of the property, be it a novel or a play or whatever, because they're afraid the slightest change they make, you know, will send the creator up in arms. I think they wanted to find out whether I understood what an adaptation was. Not only did I understand that, but going into it I was thrilled listening to them. They were sitting there quoting lines and titles and storylines from the comic books to me that I had long since forgotten, you know — stuff that I hadn't read in years. Of course, they were looking at the material on a daily basis, so it's not all that surprising. But I mean, the fact of the matter was they were very, very conversant with the comic books and with what I had done in them. They obviously had a real genuine affection for the material, as opposed to a lot of film people who approach any kind of outside property with a certain amount of contempt. There was absolutely none of that here.

DWIGHT: *Do you think that your experience in doing animated scripts has helped you or prepared you in some way for the changes that would be necessary in the movie?*

STEVE: Well, no, I don't think it really had anything to do with that. I mean, except maybe in one sense — I know that when you translate a property from the still pictures of a comic book to the moving pictures of a motion picture — uh, that's a little redundant *(laughter)* — certain changes are necessary. Not everything can be played exactly the same way on the screen as it can on a static comic-book page. Some things that look very interesting on a comic-book page are boring as hell in a movie. And, actually, some things that play very well on a screen are very tedious in comic books. The two media have a great deal in common, but they have almost just as much separating them. They are related but they are far from identical. And so I think it was just a basic realization of that, you know. I understood, you know, of course they are going to have to make some changes. It never bothered me.

DWIGHT: *Did you act as any sort of active consultant, you know, as the movie progressed?*

STEVE: Yes and no. In the early stages, before they actually went up to Marin County to shoot the picture, I did read over the script and we talked it over and met a number of times on that. I wrote up some comments on it, some of which I think were actually used, and we did actually work out one whole scene of the picture while sitting around their living room one afternoon. They were having problems with one of the horror sequences and my comic-book expertise, I think, probably proved a little helpful. The basic problem that they were facing was how to make a monster scarier and smaller at the same time. I don't want to say more than that because it will give away, you know, elements of the picture, but it occurred to me immediately how to do it and we sat around and sort of batted that idea around and I think they probably used the scene as we discussed it. So, yeah, I did take an active part in it.

DWIGHT: *To readers who are familiar with your version of Howard, what could you tell them to expect in the movie?*

STEVE: Don't expect the comic book exactly. I think you can expect something that's faithful to the spirit of the comic book, and I think you can expect to see the same character, as far as Howard is concerned. They did capture Howard very, very well. The character of Howard will be immediately recognizable and identifiable to anybody who liked the comic books. The character of Beverly is a bit different, and yet similar. The setting is still Cleveland. The tone of the story is very much like some of the lighter things we did in the comic book. It's not a total departure from the comic book by any means, nor is it exactly what people think of as, you know, the HOWARD THE DUCK comic book, particularly the early issues.

DWIGHT: *One thing that surprised me, when I heard it, was that this was going to be a live-action feature, not animated. How did they pull that off?*

STEVE: I think they pulled it off pretty well. *(Laughter.)* I can't go into the technological details, but it's done more or less in the way that E.T. or Yoda was done. There are robotics involved, and there are puppeteers involved, and that sort of thing. It is *very* strange. I met the duck face to face. It was *incredibly* bizarre to look at this thing. I mean, it *looked* like a creature to me. I couldn't tell you, you know, what it was. *(Laughter.)* Whether it was mechanical or human, it *looked* like it was organic. And it looked like something resembling a duck. It was very bizarre to meet it and shake hands with it and talk to it and watch its beak move and watch its eyes move and, you know, realize not just that I created it — that would have been bizarre enough... you know, it was sort of like meeting a child I didn't know I had *(laughter)* — but even beyond that, it was just the notion of meeting this creature that really did look like some kind of alien being.

DWIGHT: *How many Howards did they make, do you know?*

STEVE: There were several. I mean, even during the shooting there was one who did

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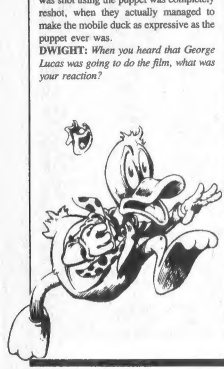
comic are boring as hell in a movie."

Photo by Peter Sorel © 1985 Universal City Studios, Inc.

"I was stunned — are you kidding??"

most of the first unit shooting and there was one who did most of the second unit shooting and then I think there may have been . . . In the early stages, actually, there was a puppet used; an actual puppet that was run with people's hands inside the duck hands and inside the duck head. The duck continued to advance technologically as time went on. *(Laughter.)* The puppet was eventually abandoned and everything that was shot using the puppet was completely reshot, when they actually managed to make the mobile duck as expressive as the puppet ever was.

DWIGHT: *When you heard that George Lucas was going to do the film, what was your reaction?*



STEVE: Do the words "myocardial infarction" mean anything to you? *(Laughter.)* I was stunned, are you kidding! In fact, I'll tell you how I found out about this — this is maybe one of the more bizarre aspects of this story. I knew, of course, that they were talking to **Lucas** about it. It had been very much up in the air, you know. Universal had to make some sort of co-production deal with **Lucas** and **Lucas** had to agree with something with Universal. Any time you get two, you know, giants like that dealing with each other, anything can go wrong at any stage of the thing. I didn't know what to expect. One morning I'm sitting here as usual, kind of bleary-eyed watching CNN, you know, after I'd just gotten up, and I get a slightly panicked phone call from, of all people, **Jerry Siegel**, who tells me. . . as if he were breaking bad news, let's put it this way, or as if something had happened that he felt I should know about, that **Lucas** and Universal had reached a deal and that it was on the front page of THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER. I think he must have been stunned at my reaction because I'm sitting there going YIPPEE! *(Laughter.)* I was amazed. I don't think he realized that I knew all that was in progress. But, yes, it was from **Jerry Siegel** that I found out that the deal had actually been made. Jerry was thrilled to hear that not only was I happy about this, but that I had an inkling of it beforehand. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *And were going to get some money from it?*

STEVE: Well, yeah. I have an interest in the film.

DWIGHT: *Were you up at Lucas' studio near San Francisco?*

STEVE: They were not shooting actually in the studio. They were shooting in different parts of San Rafael and environs. They were also shooting out in some marshes around San Rafael and around Marin County. Yeah, I was up there for one day of the shooting. I had a standing invitation to go up there at any time and wish I could have seen *more* of it in the shooting stage. Mainly, my own schedule was keeping me, like, anchored in Los Angeles. I couldn't get out of here. Something happened every time I tried. It was either a family crisis or a deadline that had to be met or something. Every time I turned around and wanted to leave, you know, something would prevent it, until finally I spoke to **Gloria Katz**'s assistant and — we were in the midst of another conversation — and she just happened to mention, "Oh, yes, we're finishing shooting" on whatever day it was. It was like two days away. It was now or never.

So, that's yet another little twist to the story — I blew the deadline on the first issue of THE SPECTRE for DC to go up there and see that last day of shooting. *(Laughter.)* I'll tell you how it happened, too — this is really strange. I had literally, like, twelve hours to make up my mind. What was I gonna do? Was I gonna stay down here and write the first issue of SPECTRE and get it in on time, or was I going to go shopping for some clothes to wear up to Lucasfilm because literally every stitch of clothing I had was in the cleaners? *(Laughter.)* I would have had to have gone up there either naked or smelly, and I couldn't see doing either. So it came down to that. The evening had to be spent either one way or the other, and ultimately I chose to go with the duck and that was the end

"I can't get along with Marvel's editors."

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of THE SPECTRE. *(Laughter.)* They decided, "Okay, you missed this deadline. That's it. We're all finished with that."

DWIGHT: *You mean SPECTRE's over?*

STEVE: SPECTRE's over, yeah. As far as I'm concerned it is. You didn't know about this?

DWIGHT: *No, I didn't know at all.*

STEVE: If it weren't such a bad pun I would say "dead and gone."

DWIGHT: *That's strange that DC would kill that.*

STEVE: We were having certain disagreements over it, anyway, in terms of the artwork. I had some real problems with the artwork and was trying to get them to . . .

DWIGHT: *Who was the artist?*

STEVE: **Gene Colan**. And this is why it was a problem: the artwork they got was okay, I suppose — the book that Gene did — but Gene and I have worked together a lot and I know what he's really capable of doing and this wasn't it. I wanted major corrections and redrawing in the book. I mean, there is nobody in the comic-book business, I don't think, with the possible exception of **Marv Wolfman**, who is a bigger **Gene Colan** fan than I am. It was not dissatisfaction with Gene, or anger at Gene, or anything. I was very upset that I had gotten what I considered a kind of mediocre Gene Colan job, and DC and I had some major fights over whether or not the book was gonna be redrawn. Initially they said, "Yes, we'll redraw the entire issue. We'll have Gene redraw it." Then they backpedaled from that and said, "Well, okay, we'll redraw maybe half of the first issue." And then it became a third of the first issue. Finally, it was like six pages and a couple of panels. My own feeling was that the book was just not special enough at that point that it would be worth doing.

DWIGHT: *Do you feel that DC was, you know, more concentrating on their other projects and really didn't want to spend the time . . . ?*

STEVE: No, I don't think it had anything to do with that. I don't think it was because of any other particular project. I think it was just a general attitude that they decided to take. They wanted to get the project underway. God knows, I did, too. There had been a lot of delays on it for various reasons up to that point, and we had finally gotten the first issue drawn and there it was and it just sort of sat there, as far as I was concerned. It was just not what it could have been.

My feeling at that point was that I wanted to do a book that would at the very least be noticed, you know, when it went out on the stands, and possibly more than that. I wanted at least a chance at a hit, and the way the business works these days — to paraphrase some movie phrase or another — if you don't have a first issue then you don't have a comic book. People judge entire series on the basis of a first issue and they won't *look* at it afterwards if the first issue doesn't impress them a great deal. And this simply didn't. It wasn't that kind of a job. It was not what Gene was capable of, at his best. It wasn't enough to interest people in that character.

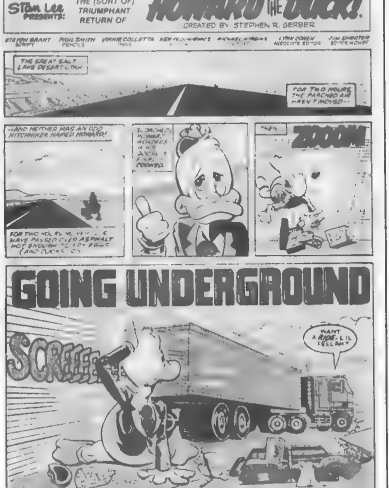
DWIGHT: *What are your feelings on HOWARD THE DUCK right now, just in general?*

STEVE: Well, I mean, I still obviously have a great deal of affection for the character. I'm hoping that the movie will be good. I hope it'll be a good picture. I would like other people to feel that same affection for the character. *I wish* I could be writing the comic book. I can't simply because I can't get along with Marvel's editorial staff.

DWIGHT: *Can you talk a little bit about what happened there, because it was announced that you would write HOWARD and then suddenly Steve Grant came in . . .*

STEVE: Well, no, **Steve Grant** didn't "come in." That story that they published was actually a story that was four years old, and apparently they didn't even bother to update the jokes in it. Steve told me he had written it as topical humor at the time, and the story was four years old when they published it. So, I don't know. I haven't read it. I glanced at it. It was a real boring art job, a terrible cover. The people working on the film also commented to me that it looked like a really bad comic book.

My problem with them was very simple. I wanted to pick up HOWARD as I



The (sort of) triumphant return of Howard, from HTD #32. "A real boring art job," says Steve.

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Toth; "Thought and Egg;; by Doug Moench and Ernie Colon; "Fleming" by Ernie Colon, "Cookie" by DuBay; and a cover by Boyette.

Flaming Carrot #15

FINAL RENEGADE ISSUE!!!! This issue marks Bob Burden's departure from Renegade. This book will be going on to self-publication after this, probably on a quarterly schedule, although nothing is firm yet. Due to the collectability of this book, it is recommended that you stock up well on this title. No news as to contents at the time of this newsheet going to press.

Silent Invasion #5 "Identity Crisis!" Phil Housely and Ivan Kalashnikov close in on Matt, who discovers a shocking secret about his past. Meanwhile, Peggy takes on a whole, new, aggressive personality. This issue will also see the beginning of a new feature as Silent Invasion expands to 34 pages. A regular backup feature, titled "Suburban Nightmares", will contain short experimental stories set in the fifties, to be in keeping with the lead feature. The writer will be the same as the rest of the book, Larry Hancock, and Silent Invasion's artist Michael Cherkas will be assisted on "Suburban Nightmares" by John van Bruggen.

Black Zeppelin #6 FINAL ISSUE IN THE SERIES! FINAL ISSUE IN THE SERIES!

The final issue of the series will feature two very important stones for those collectors of Gene Day work. One, "Gravediggers Banquet" is a very early story done in collaboration with Dave Sim. Also featured is a textless story from Dan Day. Right.

LOOK, GOMER AND GARCIA! DO YOU SEE FUNNY OLD MR. GRAVE-DIGGER IN THIS PICTURE? THAT'S RIGHT! HE'S THE MAN WITH THE BIG SHOVEL. MR GRAVE-DIGGER WORKS HARD ALL DAY, DIG, DIG, DIG, THEN BIG A HOLE CAN YOU DIG!

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"Shooter would not publish the story."

had left it. Now, I realized I couldn't do that without making some kind of accommodation to the continuity that had been established in the meantime, so I tried to do that. I had written a story which sort of reconciled the continuity from the black-and-white books with the end of the continuity from the color books that I had done, and that kept some of what I felt were the better aspects of **Bill Mantlo**'s version of the duck, and some of the more interesting villains and things that he came up with, and kind of cleared out, you know, the stuff that I didn't feel I could write effectively. Marvel decided — and, by Marvel, I mean **Shooter** — that what this constituted was, in effect, a slap in the face to the other writers who had worked on the strip in the meantime, while I was away from it, and they didn't want to insult them and so they would not publish the story as it was written.

DWIGHT: *Well, didn't you feel somewhat insulted by what had happened to the book after you had left?*

STEVE: I did, but I had gotten over that a long time ago. It actually reached a point where, after awhile, I actually felt sorry for Bill Mantlo.

DWIGHT: *Why so?*

STEVE: Well, I mean, during the course of the lawsuit I had to look at some of those black-and-white books and read some of the letter columns. I think he was constantly put in the position of apologizing for not being me, you know, and I wouldn't wish that on anybody. I mean, a character that individual can't really be handled by someone who didn't really understand it. I mean, Bill basically had two choices: he could either completely remake the character in his own image, and try and do something with it that way, or he could try to imitate me. Only one of those had any prayer of being successful and obviously they didn't think that they could allow him to remake the character.

DWIGHT: *Well, of the comic-book writers existing now, who do you feel could actually pick up the mantle of Steve Gerber and write HOWARD?*

STEVE: Alan Moore. I feel perfectly safe in making that recommendation, since I know Alan will never work for Marvel. *(Laughter.)* I think there are any number of people who could actually do it, and they're not the people that the comic-book companies would think of immediately. Alan really is one. Oddly enough, I think **Michael Fleisher** might be. I can think of maybe one or two others, and I don't really see it as picking up my mantle. These are people who would bring enough of themselves to it that they could reshape the character and make it work in some other way. The way to make that character work for someone else is not to try to do what I did with it — and I think I'll stop giving them editorial suggestions right here.

WILL IN CONFUSION, YOU PALE, PATHETIC FOOLS— ROSE YOU BEHOLD BEFORE YOU THE PINNACLE OF EVOLUTION, THE CROWN OF CREATION!
FOR EONS, MY RACE HAS DWELLED IN YOUR DARKNESS, INFESTED YOUR FLOORBOARDS, AND OUR NUMBERS HAVE DEFIED YOUR POWER TO DESTROY US! BUT NEVER DID WE POSSESS THE POWER TO CHALLENGE YOU FOR DOMINION OF THIS WORLD!
UNTIL NOW! FOR I POSSESS THAT POWER, GRANTED ME BY THE COSMIC KEY! GAZE IN FEAR AND TREMBLING UPON... THE UNCANNY
COCKROACH!

The Maltese Cockroach, circa 1980, by Bill Mantlo, Gene Colan & Dave Simons.

DWIGHT: *You referred to the lawsuit. And way back when, you created DESTROYER DUCK as an appeal to the fans to help you finance your lawsuit against Marvel, and as a result the fans poured out their money to help you. As lawsuits are wont to do, the thing dragged on for what seemed like an incredibly long period of time, and suddenly there's, like, this little announcement that says the lawsuit's settled and we can't talk about it anymore. Well, it struck me as strange, Steve, because you kind of got on a moral high horse and, you know, asked for the fans' help, and then when the fans did help, you said, "Well, sorry, I can't talk about it."*

STEVE: Well, first of all, Dwight, I haven't gotten that complaint from any of the fans so far. Okay? Secondly, there *was* a moral issue at stake, but there was also . . . *(sigh)* . . . how to try to explain this? When I asked the fans to support me in that particular lawsuit, all they could really do in order to do that was buy copies of a comic book which wasn't going to cost them a great deal more than any other comic book they were getting — and they still got a comic book for it. Let's not forget that. Really, yes, I asked them to buy this because it would help me support the lawsuit. But the people who were really supporting the lawsuit in that particular instance were not really the fans. The people who donated their time and effort and who contributed to the comic book — **Jack Kirby, Alfredo Alcala, Shary Flenniken, Gordon Kent, Sergio Aragones, Mark Evanier, Marty Pasko, Joe Staton, Steve Leialoha, Tom Orzechowski**, I can't even name all of them — the people who did all of the work on that comic book for free, those were the people who — if anyone —

I DON'T KNOW IF ANYONE'S NOTICED— YOU ALL SEEMED TO BE TAKING THIS INDIVIDUAL'S APPEARANCE IN STRIDE—
BUT IT SEEMS TO ME WE'RE DEALING WITH ONE VERY STRANGE PERSON!

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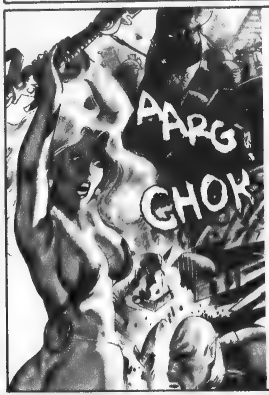

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"They wonder whether I sold out or not."

© 1982 Steve Gerber & Jack Kirby

had a right to complain about the secrecy of the agreement.

The fact of the matter is that Marvel requested that the settlement be confidential. I am perfectly willing to talk about it any time Marvel says it doesn't have to be confidential anymore. Let them drop me a note as soon as they're willing to say that and I'll go on national television if you want and gladly say exactly what it is. But at their request it was a condition of being able to settle the suit. I had to agree to that.

Now, I will tell you this — because this *is* a question the fans have asked me; they wonder whether I sold out or not, you know — and that's a very reasonable question. When there was a settlement about to be reached, I went to the people most concerned with the DESTROYER DUCK book and with certain other fund-raising projects, like the F.O.O.G. project, Deni Loubert's portfolio for the thing . . . which actually was something Deni and the artists undertook entirely by themselves. She called me up and said, "By the way, we're going to raise all of this money for you." *(Laughter.)* We had only met, I think, once before that. But, before I did make the settlement, I spoke to certain people — Kirby in particular, Jerry Siegel, Dean Mullaney, various others — who couldn't be told the conditions of the settlement afterwards. I wanted to know how they felt about it. Did they think we had to fight this all the way or did they think I should settle if I was getting an equitable settlement? Every single one of those people advised me, "If it's really fair, then make the settlement. That's what you were trying to get." You don't file lawsuits to win moral victories most of the time. You file them to win legal victories. And as far as I'm concerned, we did.

DWIGHT: *Do you think that your protracted battle with Marvel helped establish in their minds, possibly, the fact that they do have to pay more attention to creators' rights?*

STEVE: Oh, I think it definitely did. Yeah. There were people . . . let me see how to answer this. A whole new group of people was coming into comics just at the time that that lawsuit was filed, and I don't think it's any coincidence that most of those people — the new writers and artists at that time — now take a certain amount of ownership rights, copyright ownership, shares in the merchandising of their characters and so on — I don't think that it's any accident that those people take that almost for granted.

DWIGHT: *It's almost as it should be but . .*

STEVE: Oh, absolutely as it should be!

DWIGHT: *But it's still kind of a radical thought, a radical notion, to those of us who were there before.*

STEVE: Oh, sure. My experience has been, interestingly — talking to different generations of professionals — that the younger people now seem to have a real understanding of what it is they are actually creating, in terms of properties that sometimes can last for more than 50 years and generate income all of that time and can be valuable to them. They understand sort of what a copyright is and what the value of sharing in that copyright might be, or even a simple contractual agreement that allows some kind of share in the profits of the character whether your name is on the copyright or not. The older professionals still don't quite grasp that. It's very interesting to me. I mean, what does an author really have? All he really owns are his copyrights, you know. And the older people in the business, even people my own age, look at me and sort of stare like . . .

DWIGHT: *"Are you from Mars?"*

STEVE: Yeah. Right. It's like, "No-no! It's the page rate!" *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *Take the money and run.*

STEVE: They still don't entirely grasp it.

DWIGHT: *Well, in light of all you've said today, is Steve Gerber going to come back to comics at all?*

STEVE: Yeah, I hope so. As a publisher, possibly.

DWIGHT: *As a publisher?*

STEVE: Possibly.

STEVE GERBER

"The industry has weeded out anybody

WHAT DO YOU MEAN-- HAVING BOTH FEET ON THE GROUND TERRIFIES ME?
LISTEN, TOOTS, MAYBE WE OUGHTTA SAVE THIS FOR--
NO BEGGIN' OFF, PAL!
YOU ACCUSED ME OF SOMETHING, AND I--
I WASN'T ACCUSIN'-- JUST MAKIN' AN OBSERVATION!
YOU'RE OBVIOUSLY TOUCHY ABOUT-- OH ALL RIGHT!!

Val Mayerik & Steve's original HTD syndicated strip.

DWIGHT: *You fool!*

STEVE: No, I don't think so.

DWIGHT: *Oh? Why? What makes you think that? I'm curious, because Steve Gerber has made such a reputation as a writer — what is the attraction of being a publisher?*

STEVE: Well, for one thing, I would like to publish some of the stuff that I write. Part of the attraction of publishing, obviously, is having some kind of real control over it; not just over the copyrights and over the ownership of the material — which can be, you know, had elsewhere — but also over the quality of it.

DWIGHT: *Yeah, but considering the nature of a lot of the independents, surely you could almost write your own contract in that.*

STEVE: That's not quite true.

DWIGHT: *Oh?*

STEVE: No, not quite. For example, if I were to go to work, let's say, for First Comics right now — I don't like the reproduction process they use on their books. They're not going to change their entire process for one writer, no matter who he is, and I don't frankly think that I could make that kind of demand of them, that I'm in any kind of position to in the comics industry at the moment. I mean, I was never really thrilled with the printing on the Baxter books at Eclipse, either. Certainly, it was good printing — I just don't like the Baxter format very much. The same is true pretty much across the board. Renegade does its particular kind of comic which, again, it's a format I'm not particularly crazy about. I would like to be able to control those aspects of it, as well.

DWIGHT: *Well, what is the format that attracts you?*

STEVE: Boy, I really like what Frank and Lynn came up with on that DARK KNIGHT book. Boy, do I like that format! It is almost ideal.

DWIGHT: *Well, there's a sense of permanency to it —*

STEVE: And no sense of pretentiousness, which is remarkable. It doesn't look overblown, and yet the paper quality, the kind of color reproduction they're getting on it, the kind of coloring that Lynn is doing on it — I have never seen a book look that good, and I'm including any of the graphic novels or RONIN or anything else. I mean, basically, DARK KNIGHT is all of the experimentation they were doing in RONIN — this is the result of the experiments. They really did find out what worked and what didn't and were able to bring a lot of that knowledge to the DARK KNIGHT books. And they're learning even more as they're doing this.

DWIGHT: *Since you have established yourself a pretty successful career outside of comics, even while maintaining some fairly close contacts, what is your observation of the industry now?*

STEVE: (*Long pause.*) That is such a broad question. It's a very strange situation right now. It's so rife with paradoxes that it's difficult to know where to begin to tear it apart. You have a situation where — for the first time, I think, in years — the comic-book market is actually expanding. There's interest, you know, in carrying these items in bookstores as well as the comic-book specialty stores and everything else. There's a real chance, I think, to break out of the market that has been confined to the specialty stores for all of this time — essentially consisting of mutant fans, you know. At the same time, the industry has made a point of weeding out virtually anybody who could appeal to those people.

Probably the single worst aspect of the industry at the moment is that, I think, it really has no capacity, maybe even no competence, for the most part, to train new people. They don't know how to use talent. They have absolutely no idea how to handle human beings. They have no idea how to make use of talented people. All they know is how to do variations on what they have done before, and not really very extreme variations. Somebody put it really interestingly about **John Byrne's** MAN OF STEEL — another writer I had lunch with a few weeks ago, and we were laughing about this. He said that, you know, the sales on MAN OF STEEL #1 were phenomenal, like a million copies or something — first million-seller, probably, for any comic-book company in what must be close to 20 years — and he was saying that, of course, now everybody at DC in the editorial department is running around trying to convince themselves that they had something to do with it. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *Success has many parents.*

STEVE: Oh, sure. Yeah. And in fact they had nothing to do with it, any more than they had to do with the success of DARK KNIGHT. In fact, left to their own devices the editorial departments of DC and Marvel couldn't come up with that big a success, either one of them. They needed somebody with the following of a **John Byrne**. They needed somebody who was going to be as creatively inventive, and as demanding in terms of the technical aspects of the book, as **Frank Miller** was. Those companies are incapable of doing it themselves. They will try to take credit for it. They *have* tried to take credit for it. And, incredibly, they've even tried to blame Frank, for example, for the lateness of DARK KNIGHT. That isn't even true!

DWIGHT: *What happened there, do you know?*

STEVE: I can't speak for Frank, but the story I've heard is that the reason that all of the subsequent books were late is that the first book sat eight weeks on some editor's desk at DC Comics waiting to be sent out for blue-lines, and so all of Lynn's work, all of the color work, was pushed

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appealing outside the mutant fan market."

LOOK, TONIGHT YA BECAME DISSATISFIED WITH YOUR LIVIN' SITUATION--
DO YOU KNOW ANYONE WHO'S HAPPY ABOUT IMPOVERISHMENT?
--SO YA DECIDED TA CHANGE IT. GREAT. SPIFFY.
BUT INSTEAD O' FIGURIN' OUT HOW TO GET WHAT YA NEED, YA GET YERSELF UP FOR DISAPPOINTMENT.
--BY MAKIN' A "SHOPPIN' LIST" THAT STARTS WITH A BLAMED PORSCHE!
SEE WHAT I'M GETTIN' AT?
YES. LITTLE PEOPLE SHOULD COURT LITTLE AMBITIONS.

back and back and back further and further, you know, to the point where they could *never* have made the original schedule that they set out to make.

But I mean, even beyond that, I think DC is trying to take a certain amount of credit for the sort of publicity that the book garnered. Absolutely untrue. Word leaked out about it someplace. There was no publicity release on it or anything else. All of the reporters, all of the news media, came to Frank. They didn't go to DC. And Frank didn't go to them! That was the other interesting thing.

DWIGHT: *Well, I've heard strange things about DC's publicity department, like both Frank Miller and John Byrne have actually had to fight the publicity department to get samples of the art out to various publications.*

STEVE: I've heard that. I don't have any factual information on that.

DWIGHT: *Well, it just struck me as odd, you know. I mean, they're supposed to be a* promotion *department . . .*

STEVE: Well, promotion at both of these companies is something else that's very interesting. Essentially, the people at DC's publicity department promote the books that they decide they like, and they have actually tried in the past to *prevent* certain books from being successes by deliberately not promoting them. In some cases, it worked. In most cases, interestingly, they had absolutely no control over it, which doesn't surprise me. The public made its choice based on the books.

I don't think it's any accident that CRISIS, for example, got virtually no promotion. I mean, it's hard to think about that now, because of the reaction to the book and the amount of coverage it's gotten in the fanzines — but if you try to think back, how many handouts did you see? How many posters did you see in people's window? How much information was really distributed to the press and how much was gotten just by individual reporters going to **Marv Wolfman** and **George Perez**? The fact of the matter is that DC did almost no promotion on that book.

DWIGHT: *That is amazing. I think we've pretty well covered everything, unless there's something that you can think of.*

STEVE: Let me add one more thing about HOWARD THE DUCK. You asked me if I'd done anything on the movie in terms of consulting and that sort of thing — just today and yesterday I've been helping them write the TV and radio commercials for the thing.

DWIGHT: *Oh, yeah?*

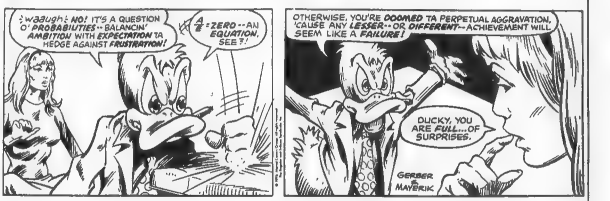
STEVE: I was over at Universal just today, over at one of the sound recording studios, to help with the voice-overs and things. It may turn out that one of the major slogans for the picture will actually be mine! *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *Oh, wow!*

STEVE: If they use it, I am proud to be able to claim that the slogan A NEW SPECIES OF HERO! is mine. *(Laughter.)* I have no idea whether they will use it or not. We did get TRAPPED IN A WORLD HE HEVER MADE! in there someplace. That's actually one of Lucas' favorites, from what I understand. And their own slogan, which is incredibly funny, is MORE ADVENTURE THAN HUMANLY POSSIBLE! *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *That does seem to capture, in a sense, that bent essence of Howard.*

STEVE: Yeah. Yeah. The spots, the stuff we recorded today is very, very funny stuff, and the trailers that I've seen for it . . . and actually almost everybody in the free world apparently saw them before I did. I saw them for the first time yesterday on a bank of monitors over at Universal, and they're wonderful. The trailers are just terrific. If the movie is as good as the trailers we'll be in business. *(Laughter.)* I'm keeping my fingers crossed.


¿WAZZUP¿ NO! IT'S A QUESTION O' PROBABILITIES-- BALANCIN' AMBITION WITH EXPECTATION TA HEDGE AGAINST FRUSTRATION!
A ≠ ZERO--AN EQUATION, SEE?
OTHERWISE, YOU'RE DOOMED TA PERPETUAL AGGRAVATION, 'CAUSE ANY LESSER-- OR DIFFERENT-- ACHIEVEMENT WILL SEEM LIKE A FAILURE!
DUCKY, YOU ARE FULL... OF SURPRISES.
GERBER MAVERICK

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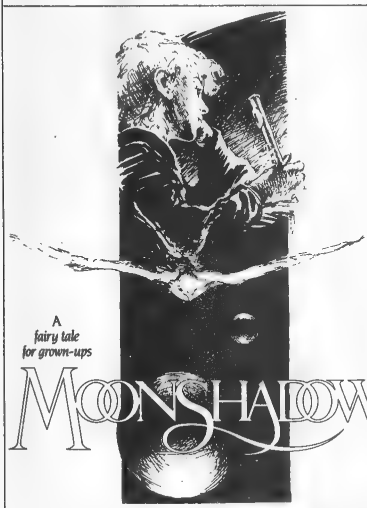
"In the seventh grade I had a

J. MARC DeMATTEIS

JIM SALICRUP: *When were you born?*
J. MARC DeMATTEIS: December 15, 1953.
JIM: *Where?*
MARC: Beth-El Hospital in Brooklyn, New York.

JIM: *When did you — ha ha — first begin thinking about comic books and writing?*
MARC: That's a good question. When I was a real little kid I think. I thought I was gonna be an artist first of all. I always used to draw...



MIKE HIGGINS: Don't they all.
MARC: Yeah, I guess everybody does. I always drew, and I guess like all us jerks when I was a kid I used to draw my own comics and sit on the floor with BATMAN covers and copy them and do all that stuff. Even through high school I still thought I was gonna end up drawing more than anything else. I was accepted at the School of the Visual Arts; and then for some reason, I think it was financial, I ended up not going. Somewhere after that what little drawing skills I had began to atrophy. My writing skills were always there but I guess I never — I used to keep journals and things like that, write that way — but I never said, "Oh, I'm gonna be a writer." Well, no. I remember being in the third grade or something and looking through the yellow pages for publishers. *(Laughter.)* "I'm gonna write a book."
JIM: *Oh, yeah? Did you find any publishers?*
MARC: Yeah, there was probably some vanity press or something, but I didn't know 'cause I was only in the third grade. The writing thing was always there, but I always thought I was gonna be an artist. Well, then, for the same matter, I always thought I was gonna be a rock 'n' roll star, too. I was always playing music...
MIKE: You weren't fat enough. *(Laughter.)*
MARC: That's a sly reference to **Jerry Garcia**, who's gained a lot of weight. *(Laughter.)* But it was the same thing. I was doing music for a long time and the writing was always on the side. But then the music just finally kind of petered out after too many years of frustration — and then I started to make money from the writing and I was a writer.
JIM: *Which came first, the music or the comic books?*
MARC: Um...in terms of what?
JIM: *What caught your interest as opposed to reality? (Laughter.)*

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religious conversion to Marvel."

Photo: T. Ligeman

#16

SOUTHERN KNIGHTS #16

When 16th Century sorcerer Aramis Merrow (a young man very much out of his time) joins the Knights in battle, things really start to get strange!

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"Illiteracy is a big problem here."

MARC: Oh, as opposed to reality. Reality never caught me. Probably . . . well I don't know. I read comics as a kid; and actually I didn't turn on to rock 'n' roll until I saw the **Beatles** on THE ED SULLIVAN SHOW, in the fifth grade. Then I went out immediately and got guitar lessons. I played in bands probably from the sixth grade through, you know, five years ago.

JIM: *Did you write your own songs?*

MARC: Yeah. I was always the lead singer and the songwriter and the rhythm guitarist. I have about 200 songs that I wrote, and lots of demo tapes that I like. *(Laughter.)* But it's like . . . you can just bang your head against the wall with that for just so long, I think. I was in this one band — the last band I was in — where we had a lot of energy and a lot of commitment, and after like two years of really hard work and a lot of headbanging it just kinda fell apart — and I never really went back to it after that.

JIM: *Well, for awhile you were doing reviews for ROLLING STONE.*

MARC: Yeah. Well, I was doing them for a lot of small papers and for GOOD TIMES, you know — not getting paid a lot but getting to see a lot of free concerts and getting free food . . .

JIM: *And free records?*

MARC: And free records and all that. Then I started doing some stuff for ROLLING STONE right around the time I first was starting here at Marvel, and I realized that I hate writing reviews.

JIM: *Why is that?*

MARC: Mike, you listen to this: I did a **Grateful Dead** album review in ROLLING STONE five or six years ago . . .

MIKE: (Gasp!)

MARC: I *slammed* it very flippantly in about four paragraphs.

MIKE: What I think about that album is that it was like one big commercial. They used their own songs as lyrics, songtitles as lyrics, so it's like a big ad for them rather than a serious album.

MARC: Well, the thing for me was all my resentment for the **Grateful Dead** coming out in this little flippant . . .

MIKE: Did you know your wife at this time?

MARC: Oh, yeah. I was married, yeah.

MIKE: You should have let her do the review.

MARC: Just so people know what we're talking about . . . my wife's a big **Dead** fan. Anyway, the point was . . . **Grateful Dead** fans are like hardcore comic-book fans, you know . . .

JIM: *Uhuh.*

MARC: . . . and I know when I sit down to write a review that I'm just some shmuck sitting down at a typewriter with an opinion — but then it's in print in something like ROLLING STONE. I got all these letters, which I saved, from all these hardcore **Grateful Dead** fans — wounded. I mean really upset and really serious and really intense and . . .

MIKE: Well, that's why they haven't put out another album since then! *(Laughter.)* It's been five years! That was their last studio album.

MARC: I realized that for me it's a waste of negative energy. I said if I'm gonna review at all I'm not gonna write negative reviews anymore unless it's something that's totally morally reprehensible. You're not going to find many record albums or comic books — aside from MOONSHADOW *(Laughter.)* — that are morally reprehensible, you know. That woke me up about the review stuff; so I really haven't written any reviews since then. So the **Grateful Dead**, Mike, made me stop writing reviews.

MIKE: I'll have to get you to write a good review of their new album when it's ready.

MARC: Are they putting out a new album?

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Marc and Marvel's mutant mania came together in the ICEMAN Limited Series.

TWO CAN PLAY AT THIS GAME

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***HONK!* #2**, that is. The second issue of the new humor magazine that's bringing America together again.

Calvin and Hobbes are just one of the fun couples dancing through a pair of back-to-back interviews with Bill Watterson and Drew Friedman, two guys who know what fun means.

Then Alan Moore, Britain's answer to H.P. Lovecraft, reminisces about his pastoral childhood, as illustrated by Peter Bagge, America's answer to Big Daddy Roth (it's okay, they're still friends.)

After that, Phil Elliott and Eddie Campbell come back again to unfold the heart-warming conclusion of their comic strip epic, "Rodney: The Autobiography Of The Man Who Will Blow Up The World." Phil and Eddie do some stuff on their own this issue, too.

J.R. Williams ("Bad Boys"), Marc Hempel ("It's Spring"), Bob Boze Bell ("Class Reunions"), J.D. King, David Miller, Glenn Dakin, and Brian James Riedel do some work of their own. That's okay. Sometimes you need to be by yourself.

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"Reality never caught me."

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MIKE: They've been working on it a long time and it hasn't come out, but this is like their 20th anniversary this year so I think they'll try to get it out.

MARC: You can put this interview in DEAD RELICS is what you can do.

JIM: *We'll salvage it somehow. You said the Beatles got you going into rock. What got you going into taking comic books more seriously?*

MARC: **Stan Lee** and **Jack Kirby** . It's the same story probably in every single interview that you do, right?

JIM: *Not really. It depends how old they are.*

MARC: That's true. I forget that we're older now, you know.

JIM: *There are professionals now who it was the DeMatteis and Perlin DEFENDERS that got them. . .*

MARC: A sorry state of affairs. *(Laughter.)* There's a whole group of people that didn't go into comics because of those issues. My early memories are like reading all the Harvey comics. I always remember reading comics. I don't remember not reading comics. One of my big childhood memories . . . when I was real young . . . was going with my father to the candy store every night, when comics were a dime. He'd go get the newspaper and I'd get a different comic every night, you know — Jimmy Olsen turning into a giant turtle and all that stuff — all those embarrassing wonderful comics.

JIM: *Was there any particular character that struck you as like. . .*

MARC: The DC stuff. When I moved on from HOT STUFF and all that stuff, which I still remember fondly. That's why I like the Star comics, 'cause it brings back all my memories of all that stuff. Then the DC comics. I read SUPERMAN and the square-jawed BATMAN, which I loved so much as a kid. I still remember a story from when I was in the fourth or fifth grade called "Robin Dies At Dawn!" which . . .

MIKE CARLIN: That's my favorite one!

MARC: It had this great cover, right? The story was stupid. It was only . . . Batman woke up and he was having an e.s.p. experiment or something. But it had the greatest cover, with Batman with Robin dead in his arms. . . .

MIKE CARLIN: The first time I saw it was a reprint though.

MARC: Anyway, the stuff that I really like — I was really big on GREEN LANTERN and THE JUSTICE LEAGUE. Those are my two real favorites; and for some reason, although in those days nobody knew who anybody was who was doing comics, everybody knew who **Gil Kane** was. I remember knowing who **Gil Kane** was and loving **Gil Kane's** work. And then in the seventh grade I had a religious conversion to Marvel, which I guess was '66 or something like that — when all that stuff was really-taking off. You were like, "Oh, you still read SUPERMAN?" *(Laughter.)* I just went nuts with that stuff, and then for a number of years after that I would occasionally peek at a JUSTICE LEAGUE or something. But I couldn't really bring myself to go look at a DC comic until, like, 1970 or so When I look back on that stuff — I've been weeding out whatever I have left in my collection, you know, and getting rid of stuff — that **Stan Lee** and **Jack Kirby** FANTASTIC FOUR and THOR is still really, really good stuff. That's one of the reasons why I think superheroes are a dead end; because no matter what we do, they did it then and they did it better. I really think that if the stuff's gonna be better you've gotta step outside of that universe — outside of that whole mindset — and start doing some new things. I got ahold of some THORs that I actually hadn't even read, like '65, '66 — from that era — and I sat down one afternoon with ten of them and it was like being twelve-years-old again and it was great. I really enjoyed them. The stuff is that good. Around the same time, I looked back at some old JUSTICE LEAGUEs and they just didn't do it for me that way. But the **Kirby** stuff, when I look back over the whole realm of the past twenty years or whatever — it's amazing! I always liked to look at **Stan Lee** and **Jack Kirby** as the **Lennon** and **McCartney** of comics, you know. With Stan, **Kirby** did the best stuff of the Sixties. Then in the Seventies, you know, NEW GODS, FOREVER PEOPLE. . .If you want to make a parallel, that's like the **John Lennon PLASTIC ONO BAND album.** It is a nice parallel because that **Lennon** album really set a tone for all the music to come in the next decade — and I think — in the same way — everybody fed off of those **Kirby** comics for the next ten years. Stan kind of petered out into the comic-book equivalent of **Paul McCartney**. . .*(Laughter)*. . .which is okay 'cause I still love Stan's stuff.

And then the next leap was the mid-Seventies, when people like **Gerber** and **Englehart** came in and started doing comics that I could read without embarrassment as I hit 19 or 20 years old, you know. So they kind of kept me going, and then I came along.

JIM: *You were into music and writing and then finally. . .how did you finally decide. . .*

MARC: The music was the real big dream, but I was doing the writing. I was, you know, writing short stories and not selling them. Working on an atrocious novel. From college on I started taking my writing very seriously. So I was doing the music at night and writing during the day. I had a few failed attempts when I was younger trying to get into comics — really abysmal stuff which, happily, they rejected. When I was about 18 I sent some stuff to Marvel and I got this letter from **Don McGregor,** you know — at that point he hadn't even written anything so I didn't know *who* he was — *insulting* me and tearing my work apart. I could never read his material after that. *(Laughter.)* I think I had an aborted attempt when DC was having their apprentice program, whatever it was, like in '73. Nothing ever happened with that. Then I just forgot about it, you know, and went on with the music. And then I just thought, "Let me give it one more shot, what the

BUT, BENEATH CAPTAIN WOO'S ICY EXTERIOR, IS A SOUL IN TORMENT...
DAMN THEM ALL! THEY'LL NEVER UNDERSTAND WHAT IT MEANS TO BE... UGLY.
I'D TRADE THE GLORIES OF MY CAREER IN THE FLEET IN AN INSTANT IF I COULD ONLY GAZE INTO THE MIRROR AND SEE--

Marc and Gil Kane in a science-fiction tale for DC's short-lived TIMEWARP.

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Have you ever heard of ROBERT WALKER? Probably not but you will be hearing a great deal about this new artist soon to emerge onto the comic book scene. He's young, dependable and his talent is striking. The women that he draws are...awesome. Feminine, sensitive, sensual. No ugly, musclebound heroines here.

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We think you'll like this book. We're pushing it back on our schedule to give you a chance to view this new art work. The issue is FEMFORCE No. 6, now shipping in November. It's worth the wait.

FEMFORCE 6

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"The editors weren't giving me work."

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hell." I figured, "There's no way to get in the door at Marvel so let me try DC." I sent some stuff in — just in the slush pile — and I got a letter back saying, "**Paul Levitz** is accepting material for WEIRD WAR TALES and HOUSE OF MYSTERY" — which I had never heard of let alone looked at. So I went out and bought a copy of WEIRD WAR TALES. Then Paul sent me his little writer's kit, and I sent him...

JIM: *What was that like, the writer's kit?*

MARC: The writer's kit? It was...actually, a lot of writers now could use the writer's kit. It was just a basic kind of this-is-what-you-do. This is the caption. This is 5.5 panels a page. This is 35 words a panel. Real basic format stuff. This is how a plot is done. This is how this is done. It was a writer's guide, technically speaking.

JIM: *So you went off to DC...*

MARC: Right. Right. This was all through the mail. So, I sent my first three plots to Paul and I got this letter back that not only tore apart my plots but insulted my typing as well. *(Laugher.)* "And if you're gonna keep sending in plots either type more slowly or get a professional typing service, 'cause this is terrible."

JIM: *Was it?*

MARC: Yeah. Lots of things were crossed out. When you get the opportunity and the door's open it's like, "I've got to write this fast and mail it out tomorrow!" I've always been that way. If the door opens a crack I want to push it and get in. But Paul said, "Please feel free to submit again" — so I immediately submitted something else which was a science-fiction thing. I got a letter back saying, "I'm not even gonna read this because I'm not looking at science-fiction." Very Paul. *(Laughter.)* and while I was doing that and playing in the band I was working in this bookstore in Brooklyn...

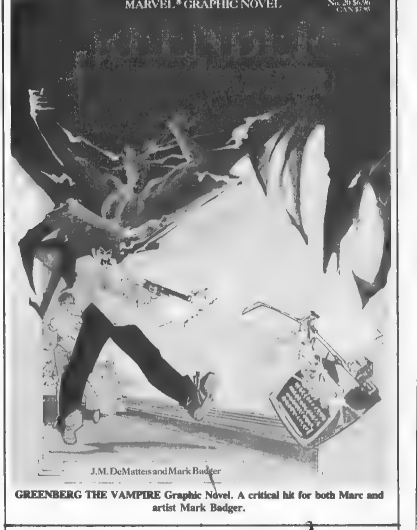
JIM: *What was the name of the band, by the way?*

MARC: The name of the band was Brooklyn. We were legends in our own minds. Actually, we were very popular in our limited realm.

JIM: *If Boston and Chicago could do it...*

MARC: Right. I was working in this bookstore and we all got fired because of the band, 'cause we had this gig at Max's Kansas City and this was during the big rush at the beginning of the semester when we used to work, like, from 7:00 o'clock in the morning until 11:00 o'clock at night. And we had to go and do this gig. "If you leave now and go to this gig you're fired." We all got fired.

JIM: *Gave up a lucrative career?*



GREENBERG THE VAMPIRE Graphic Novel. A critical hit for both Marc and artist Mark Badger.

MARC: Yes. *(Laughter.)* I think I might have been getting $2.50 an hour at that point. So then I actually had an opportunity to go see Paul face to face, and I brought a bunch of plots in and he liked one of them. Basically that was it. I sold him on that. It sounds very casual now, but at the time it was like...he was going over the plot and going, "Yeah, well, when you do the script this'll be this page and that'll be that page..." — and it's slowly sinking in, (whispers)" He's gonna buy this, he's gonna buy this" — which was very exciting. In retrospect I look back on those stories and they're really embarrassing stories.

JIM: *Which was the first one you sold?*

MARC: The first one...it actually didn't come out for two or three years after that. It went from Paul to **Jack Harris** to **Len Wein**, and Len finally printed it. It was called "The Lady-Killer Craves Blood."

JIM: *I think DC has an option on that for a movie. (Laughter.)*

MARC: It was a vampire story. It was doing that material which got me into all the horror stuff, which I did a lot of. Before that I never had any kind of interest in horror whatsoever, but around the same time I was doing that stuff I was reading **Stephen King** for the first time — and I figured I'd better learn about vampires and all this dark fantasy. I must have done 200 vampire stories and werewolf stories. I discovered that when you play with them the right way they can be a lot more interesting than the super-hero stuff.

JIM: *Why was that?*

MARC: There's a lot more latitude, you know. It's not limited to that little box. I know a million people in the business will go, "We have no little box." We have a little box.

MIKE CARLIN: What little box?

J. MARC DeMATTEIS

"Two guys in costumes punching

(Laughter.) The office, is that what you're talking about?

MARC: You wouldn't be working in this small office if you were doing a horror book. I just find there's a lot more leeway, 'cause I always found with that kind of dark fantasy you can use that really to play with things psychologically. You're getting into archetypes. Primal myths. You can go in a million different directions — from "The Lady-Killer Craves Blood" to GREENBERG THE VAMPIRE to THE GARGOYLE and back again. The kind of dark fantasy that **Bradbury** does, **Ellison**, and people like that. . . I grew up loving comics and I still love comics and yet to me, basically, the bottom line is that two guys in costumes punching each other is ridiculous.

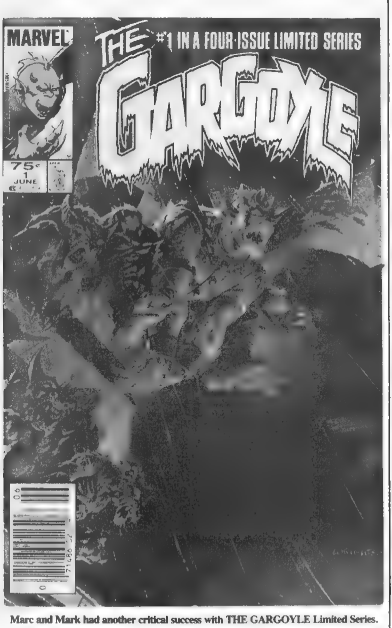
JIM: *But biting each other in the neck is. . .*

MARC: Okay, right. *(Laughter.)* I just feel that you can really investigate the mind and the spirit and play with those symbols and archetypes. If you look at the GARGOYLE mini-series that I did with **Mark Badger** . . . it's not horror, really. There was no horror gross-out. . . no blood and guts and gore. . . It was a psychological fantasy. You take the interior life and make it concrete . . . give it substance . . . and play with it. **Badger** and I are doing a GARGOYLE graphic novel — and we sat down recently to talk over the plot. What we come up with is horror only in the sense that we're dealing with the horrors we all carry around inside us. But it's really a very quiet story. Very eerie. Very intense. But quiet. The same with the GARGOYLE mini-series. It had its action. . . but, for the most part, it was a character study. A look into the interior world. . . the world of the spirit. You can work with real people, instead of this. . . I don't know. I guess like even in the Seventies when **Gerber** and **Englehart** came in — they kept me reading comics because they were doing. . . It was MAN-THING that kept me reading comics, and **Englehart's** DOCTOR STRANGE, and SWAMP THING and NEW GODS and FOREVER PEOPLE. Just by raising it to the level of these gods it took on a different tone, you know. In those years I stopped reading SPIDER-MAN and THE HULK and all that. It was the offbeat stuff that kept me interested as I got older, and that's the stuff that I always felt more comfortable writing. And I think one of the reasons that some of the stuff, my early stuff when I came to Marvel, really sucked was because I was always uncomfortable with the super-hero jacket.

But anyway, I'm getting off from what I was talking about. You walked in and you had at most eight pages to tell a story, so basically you were structuring a nice short story within limitations in terms of. . . literally, Paul would say 5.5 panels a page, 35 words per panel. And I would sit there and count every work. You learn a lot. You do a lot of those and you learn a lot of discipline and you really learn your craft a lot more than never having written anything and coming along — "How'd you like to do a SPIDER-MAN fill-in?" I found that was real valuable. It was kinda like a ladder that you went up. You started on the short mystery stuff. . . if they liked your work, then you went for an eight-pager. Then they gave you your first. . . I remember my first book-length WEIRD WAR TALES, you know. It was a very big deal. And then from there if you were still doing good they gave you superhero stories. And then you got a full- length superhero story. It was a nice gradual thing.

JIM: *Structurally, it makes sense to begin that way, but it's a little strange to start people off in one genre and then. . .*

MARC: Well, yeah, but in terms of learning the rules of the game it was a real good



Marc and Mark had another critical success with THE GARGOYLE Limited Series.

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each other is ridiculous.''

way to do it. The rules of good writing apply no matter *what* the genre. Because you really did learn the rules of the game. Paul was a good person to work with. It was kinda like learn as you earn. They said if they saw the talent was there they would develop it. I remember the first script, going home and writing it. I went home, and I remember reading a MASTER OF KUNG-FU then — so I go back and I do this eight-page story with all these weird intercutting things and caption overlaps and all this strange stuff. And of course I go in and Paul goes, ''No. No. No. Clear caption telling.'' And he starts crossing everything out. It's the same old line which applies to any art — before you can break the rules you have to learn the rules. That's what that was really good for, was learning the rules. ''Cause when it came to my own short stories — when I used to write I was unfortunately, for a period, under the influence of guys like **Tom Robbins** and **Richard Brawtigan**, you know — and I tried to write these really ''hip'' stories, very playful, but I didn't have a real grasp of what went under that. Until you get what's under that you can't really do it. You can't break the rules until you learn the rules. So I found that was really, really helpful to me as a writer. People say, ''Ah, you can't learn anything by writing comics.'' I feel I've learned a lot.

JIM: *Do you think if you were actually at the point where you did know the rules, and you were breaking them knowing what you were doing, would they have accepted it?*

MARC: No. *(Laughter.)* Probably not — unless I was just so brilliant they'd go, ''This guy is brilliant. Let's move him right up.''

JIM: *The Alan Moore...*

MARC: Yeah, well, he has a lot of years behind him, as well, you know. Yeah, I wonder. I would think not — not on those books.

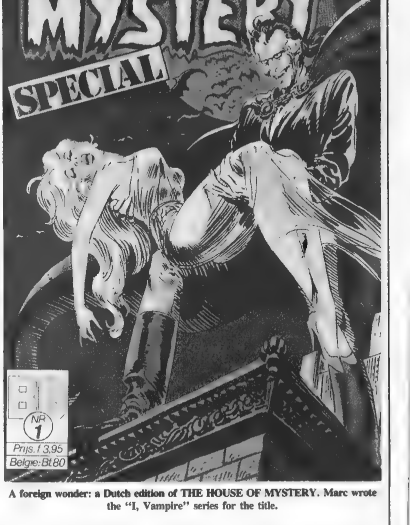
JIM: *About those books, I'm just curious — did they tell you the reasons for them? Was it just pure structure training as a writer?*

MARC: I really think that's where it was. I think that's where it came from. Because once you got on to the other stuff there was more leeway in the structure. You could begin to bend some rules a bit. But it's always helpful for all of us who like to write and write and write and write and write to go back occasionally and count the words in each panel.

You can get away with a lot more in Marvel-style than you can full script. People coming in and doing it Marvel-style or whatever name they choose to apply to it — so much of the weight goes to the artist that you really don't learn that way. When you're sitting down and writing full script it's almost like writing a filmscript. Everything is there — Panel One...Camera Angle...everything that's in that panel. You have to pace the story. You have to tell the story visually, and then the artist interprets your directions. But with Marvel-style, if you want to get lazy you can get lazy. You can just kinda say, ''Here's the outline and here you go artist and go ahead and you do all the work'' — which I tend not to do anyway. My plots, if you remember, are pretty detailed. I break them down page by page, panel by panel, practically — especially if I haven't worked with the artist before. You know, when you get into stuff like MOON-SHADOW it's a whole different style of working altogether — which we can talk about later.

JIM: *I'm still curious about those DC books. I was never involved with that. Did they have beyond structure and craft some sort of commercial philosophy about what kind of stories they wanted?*

MARC: You see, the mystery books at that



A foreign wonder: a Dutch edition of THE HOUSE OF MYSTERY. Marc wrote the ''I, Vampire'' series for the title.

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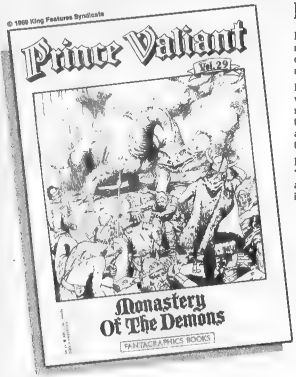

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"Paul Levitz tore apart my plots."

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point — I know in the early Seventies supposedly the mystery books were really great — that's when **Berni Wrightson** and that group was breaking in — but by the time I was doing them they were kind of like the bottom of the barrel, you know. All the art was shipped off to the Philippines. It was like — that same old thing — when you're writing a story you picture it as **Neal Adams**, you know, and they very often came back by somebody that you'd never even heard of in your life. Some of those guys were really good. I did this one WEIRD WAR TALES story that was drawn by **Jose Jodloman** and it was really good. Really nice stuff. But that was the exception more than the rule.

But no, I don't think there was any kind of commercial philosophy. I really don't think there was. I think that Paul really approached it — and he may correct me if I'm wrong — as using those books as a training ground. They would say, "We don't know who buys these books. We have no idea." 'Cause you know they didn't sell to the fan market. I myself was not even conscious of them. I mean, you go and you flip the comic rack and your eye wouldn't even register WEIRD WAR TALES. Why WEIRD WAR TALES even existed you never knew.

JIM: *Well, you created the...uh, what?*

MARC: THE CREATURE COMMANDOS. *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *How did that come about?*

MARC: That was...I was doing WAR TALES for about the last six months before the DC implosion put me out of work for almost a year. And the last idea I had...I took a look at the title, WEIRD WAR, and I said, "Ya gotta have a lot of monsters." So I had this idea for THE CREATURE COMMANDOS, you know. It was really a silly idea, but I think it was so silly that it worked on some level. I mean, I don't stand up for this as great art or anything.

JIM: *Well, it's no sillier than Archie's Groovy Ghoulies.*

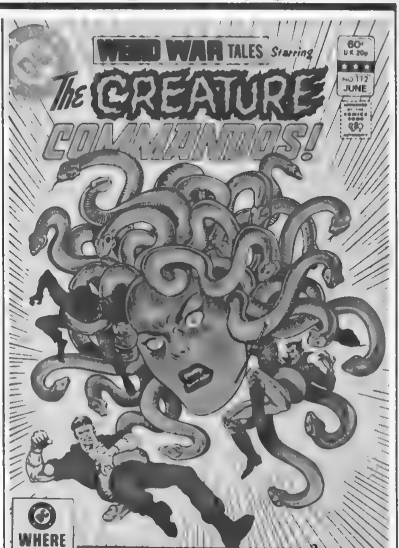
MARC: I guess so. I had that idea, and then after I was getting work there again was when they were trying to revivify the mystery books by putting series in them. So I went to Len with THE CREATURE COMMANDOS — the actual title may have been Len's; I think it was — and he said the same thing. "That's so silly that it will work. Let's do it." And we did it and it was silly and nothing came of it and the book died anyway.

JIM: *What was the other one?*

MARC: I, VAMPIRE — which I liked a lot more.

JIM: *How'd that come about?*

MARC: The same thing. Len had a title.



One of Marc's unforgettable creations: The Creature Commandos.

I went to Len and I said, "You're looking for a series and I have GREENBERG" — to which he said basically that it would never play in Peoria. *(Laughter.)* But he liked the idea that there was a man and a woman vampire in love there, something like that, and he threw the title out to me. I think I heard later that the WEREWOLF BY NIGHT series, when they originally conceived it, was going to be called I, WEREWOLF. So I went off and just developed that. I had a really good working relationship with Len. Some of the best stuff that I did at DC was stuff that I did with Len. It was one of those rare editor-writer relationships where we just kind of understood each other; and by the virtue of his just being there, not bludgeoning me over the head with anything, I just did really good work for him — and we enjoyed working together. I hope we will be working together again someday.

JIM: *What else at that period, before you came over to Marvel...*

MARC: What else was I doing?

JIM: *Any other series?*

MARC: I did RED TORNADO, believe it or not. I did AQUAMAN, which I had

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a great time doing. It was a character . . . it was the same thing. Someone says to you, "Do you want to write such-and-such?" And I go, "AQUAMAN?" *(Groan.)* But of course at that point in my life I had to take anything 'cause you want to pay the rent and you want to get in. So then I sat down with all this Aquaman stuff — **David Michelinie's**, especially — and Paul gave me this character outline that he had done, and I said, "God, there's a lot of potential in this thing." I think I did about six stories and **Dick Giordano** did about four of them, and **Don Heck** did a few. I can look back on them and not be embarrassed, you know, which is really good. In fact there was one of them called "The Poseidon Adventure" that still really holds up. The first time I spoke to **Allen Brennert** he mentioned it. "Yeah, I remember that AQUAMAN story you did." And I said, "You mean someone actually read it?" *(Laughter.)* I can look back on that stuff and not be embarrassed, whereas I look back on a lot of the early Marvel stuff and it embarrasses me that it even exists and I would like to go knock on people's doors and get the copies back and burn them, you know. So, I did AQUAMAN. I did RED TORNADO. There are a couple of RED TORNADO stories that I actually like to look back on. And by then they started with the science-fiction books, TIME WARP and — what was the other one — MYSTERY IN SPACE, and I did a lot of stuff for that.

JIM: *Were you able to reuse some of the early science-fiction plots?*

MARC: Yeah. Well, actually, the nice thing with all the mystery books was they went through a lot of hands. They went from Paul to **Jack Harris** to Len. So if one of them didn't like a plot, I'd just hold on to it and try to sell it to the next guy. I think I hardly had one that I never sold.

JIM: *That's how every writer does it.*

MARC: Yeah. Yeah. But the science-fiction stuff I really enjoyed even more than the mystery stuff. There was one story that I think they finally printed in MADAME XANADU, the book that **Englehart** and **Rogers** did, called "Falling Down to Heaven" that **Brian Bolland** did a beautiful job on, and I really liked that story. That was his first job for **DC**, and it was a really beautiful job and a really nice story. Really, the type of stories I like to do are the very quiet, human stories, you know. So I look back on a lot of that stuff I did at DC and, "Gee, that was really good." And then again I go to my first batch of DEFENDERS and CONAN and just want to die.

JIM: *What made you leave DC?*

MARC: Well, basically — I just had this thing in my head that I always wanted to work for Marvel. Although the Marvel that I finally got to had no relation to the Marvel

Marc and Brian Bolland produced this short science-fiction back-up tale for MADAME XANADU #1.

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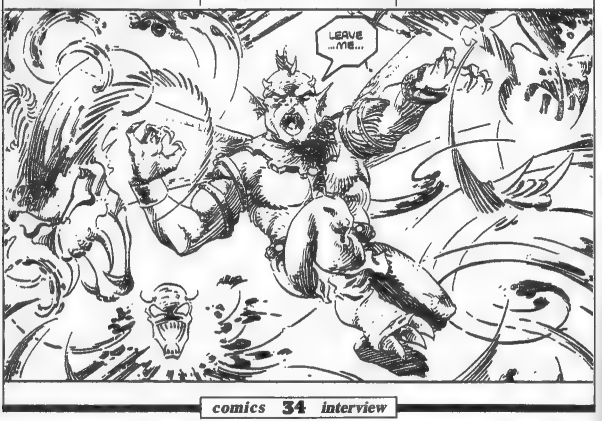
J. MARC DeMATTEIS

"I wrote Shooter and said, 'I'm a profes-

that I grew up reading, I just wanted to write for Marvel. **Shooter** had some samples of mine that had been sitting up here for the longest time — it's hard to place all this — during the DC implosion period. I had these samples. I was getting no work. I must have still been playing music and doing temp work and all the terrible things that we all have to do — going into offices and spending two days collating paper from 9:00 to 5:00 for $2.50 an hour. Anyway, **Shooter** had these samples for a real long time, and I kept writing to them and getting the run around. I finally wrote **Shooter** and said, "I'm a professional, you know — treat me with some respect." Whatever it was it worked and he pulled my samples out and he really liked them — and this had no bearing on the DC stuff. Just, I think, on the basis of a Man-Thing five-page story and a Vision five-page story and some other weird five-page story which actually was an original conception of MOON-SHADOW, but in the very early stages. And he said, "I want you to do some work for us one of these days." There was about a year there where he said, "Don't worry. When the time comes I'm gonna give you work and I'm gonna get you over here," and all that, and he was as good as his word. And in the meantime he kept me busy with fill-ins and some strange behind-the-scenes jobs. I spent two weeks helping them with a lawsuit. They were suing over Webwoman, and I spent a week upstairs there watching WEBWOMAN cartoons and taking notes. I spent a week in Stan's office — which was fun — all by myself writing all this stuff up for **Shooter**. He was always telling me these things: "Just wait, I'll get you over here." And then it was July 1980 — I guess it was around the time **Roy Thomas** quit and went to DC — so there was room over here. So he said, "We've got work for you." I wasn't so much leaving DC — I loved everybody over there and I had a great time — as coming over here because that was something that I wanted to do. And as you know, having been an editor at the time, one of the problems that I ran into was like, "Oh, here's this guy that **Shooter**'s bringing over and foisting on us. Who is he?" The editors weren't giving me the work. **Shooter** brought me over and gave me a contract and it was like, "We have to give this guy work." He's gonna write this. He's gonna write that. He's gonna write DEFENDERS. I think it took about six



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sional...treat me with some respect."

ELAINE!
"YOUNG AGAIN. AND BEAUTIFUL!"
"AND SO VERY VERY SCARED"
"I DON'T KNOW HOW THIS IS HAPPENING, ELAINE—OR WHY—BUT I HAVE YOU BACK AGAIN. I HAVE YOU BACK!"
"AND I'M NEVER LETTING GO!"

On these two pages: the tortured Gargoyle goes berserk. Then, to his amazement, discovers his true love, whom he believed dead — in THE GARGOYLE Limited Series #1.

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months of strangeness and resentment before people realized I was a decent human being... *(laughter)*...and that I could put words together in a fairly logical order. That's how I ended up over here.

JIM: *So, which were the books again?*

MARC: DEFENDERS. Well, they offered me CONAN first. I never even thought about writing CONAN. I love the Roy Thomas and Barry Smith stuff, you know, but the concept of writing it, of following Roy, was really frightening. But it's the same thing — they're offering me steady work. I'll take it. I did about a year of what I think are — aside from maybe one or two stories — just there. They weren't even bad. They were just really mediocre stories. I didn't thunk so at the time. I was really trying my best at the time. What I discovered in the course of the year was that I really hated sword-and-sorcery. I found it really boring; and anything interesting to be done with that book, for my money, Roy had already done. Plus, I wanted to be faithful to the chronology and all that — but of course Roy, between the regular color book and the black-and-white book, had covered every era in his life. If you really wanted to fit into the chronology you had to do a story and then say, "If you want to see what happens next see the SAVAGE SWORD that came out in April three years ago." It was that kind of crazy thing. So, it was frustrating and I wasn't happy with the work that I did. All in all, a sordid part of my past.

JIM: *Did you make the transition from doing full scripts to...*

MARC: ...to Marvel-style. That was another thing. It was like I had really mastered, I thought at that point, the eight- to ten-page story form; and here I was suddenly dropped into doing three 22-page books a month Marvel-style.

In part two, Marc tells how he adapted to the Marvel method of writing, his ambivalence about the DEFENDERS, his disappointment over transforming the title into THE NEW DEFENDERS, his success with THE GARGOYLE Limited Series, his failure with THE ICEMAN Limited Series, the genesis of MOONSHADOW and much more!

"The first people who inked my pencils were

LARRY HAMA

When last heard from (a whole issue ago) Dwight Jon Zimmerman and Jim Salicrup were teaming Larry Hama (what a guy) about G.I. JOE and his comic-book career. Having covered every aspect of G.I. JOE that they could — including why it has a female readership (got the letters to prove it) and why the fans don't go for it (we don' need no stinkin' fans) and how it relates to other media — the conversation turned into a more-or-less sequential account of Larry's life as an artist (I'm sorry but he's busy right now) and the unusual circumstances that brought him into the comic-book industry in the first place (why don't you call again later?), up to and through his working side-by-side with the legendary artist, Wally Wood. Now, mere nanoseconds later, the conversation picks up where it left off (it had better) as Larry tells of his time with Neal Adams . . .

JIM SALICRUP: *You went from working with Wally Wood to working at Neal Adams' Continuity Studios?*

LARRY HAMA: Continuity was a great place. At that point, I was renting desk space at Continuity for $50 a month or something really ridiculous. You know, it was like you get a desk and all of the coffee you can drink. *(Laughter.)* We used to sit there sometimes three days straight knocking out storyboards, or three days straight inking a DOCTOR STRANGE — 'cause you gotta remember, at that time Continuity was also the center of the Crusty Bunkers, which was sorta like that era's equivalent of the All-Hands Brigade or whatever.

If a job was incredibly late, then the Crusty Bunkers would gather together half-a-dozen to a dozen inkers and, you know, turn out a whole book in a day or two, all under the supervision of Neal. It was a whirl. Guys would be passing pages back and forth. Guys would be standing over boards filling in blacks upside down while somebody was, like, rendering a face at the bottom of the page. It was hectic but it was great!

And an incredibly varied amount of stuff came through the studio. We did all sorts of comics. Neal's studio also did a bunch of those Peter Pan record sets that came with a record and a comic book. And then he did these TV series adaptations, THE SIX-MILLION DOLLAR MAN and RESCUE and those things. And tons of advertising. And Neal could ink that stuff as fast as four guys could pencil it. Faster! If you didn't go fast enough, you know, Neal would be at the coffee machine knockin' down the chocolate doughnuts. *(Laughter.)*

That was a really incredible time at Continuity, because it was sort of a bizarre crossroads — anybody could walk through the door, and pretty much did.

DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN: *Weren't you involved with acting, also?*

LARRY: Ahhh, as a matter of fact that all

Neal Adams, Dick Giordano & Klaus Janson."

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came about in a weird way through Continuity. I went through about a year or more where I was just sitting there drawing for twelve to fourteen hours a day, seven days a week, and reached a sort of burnout point. I said, "The heck with this!" *(Laughter.)* I'd made a lot of money so I got on a plane and went to California for about a month and just, like, sat on beaches and drove around and just cooled out. When I got back, Neal gave me a message that some casting director had called up for me — and I called this number and this woman said that she was casting for this Broadway show, it was a musical comedy, and could I come over to audition for her? And I said, "Well, I don't know why you're calling *me*." She got my name through a friend of mine that was an actor and a singer and a dancer. I'd done a couple of pick-up gigs with this guy, playing guitar while he sang, and he had recommended me. They had asked him, "Do you know any more Asian actors?" *(Laughter.)*

So I said, "If it's a musical comedy, I don't know why you're calling me, because I neither sing nor dance." *(Laughter.)* She was so persistent that finally she said, "Well, look, this number I called you at has the same three-number prefix as mine. Where are you?" I told her where I was. She said, "We're right across the street from you." It was literally a minute away. "If you come over right now I'll see you immediately. You won't have to wait around or anything." So I said, "What the heck!" Now, I had hair down to my waist at the time, and I went over and she gave me a copy of the script and I did a reading for her. Her name was **Joanna Merlin**. She's a wonderful actress. She was one of the daughters in FIDDLER ON THE ROOF. And she said, "Well, I want to take you in and see the director right away," which was **Hal Prince**. And I read for him and he said, "Great! I want to see him in the theater tomorrow!" And I walk out very confused at this point. *(Laughter.)* **Joanna Merlin** said, "Come in tomorrow and do another reading and bring a song with you." And I said, "I keep telling you, I don't sing or dance!" She said, "You play in a rock 'n' roll band. You must do something." I said, "Well, okay, but I don't have any sheet music."

So I show up the next day at the Broadway theater where, I think, CANDIDE was still playing, and I brought my guitar and an amplifier, and I'm sitting there and there's these three guys in front of me, each with the sheet music to "The Impossible Dream" and "Try To Remember." *(Laughter.)* They ran through their numbers and it was my turn and I get up on stage and do a reading and they said, "Well, let's hear the song." The musical director is sitting right there in front of me, next to **Stephen Sondheim** and **Hal Prince**. I plug in my guitar and I give them the first two verses of **Bob Dylan**'s "Just Like A Woman"; at which point the musical director, **Paul Jemanyoni** — who conducted just about everything **Hal Prince** ever did, including SWEENY TODD and EVITA — said, "Stop! Hold it right there! Okay, give me one more verse and this time don't imitate **Bob Dylan**." And I said, "I'm not imitating **Bob Dylan**. This is the way I sing." *(Laughter.)* **Jemanyoni** slaps his forehead, at which point **Hal Prince** says, "Well, at least he's musical." *(Laughter.)* "Can you read music?" And I said, "Well, I can sight read for E-flat alto saxaphone," whereupon **Jemanyoni** slaps his head again. So I packed up my stuff and I went back to Continuity.

About two hours later, I got a phone call to come in and sign a contract. So I went up front and I talked to Neal. I said, "Gee, I don't know what the heck is going on." He said, "You should go check it out. Ex-

A tender moment for the Man of Steel, rendered by Neal Adams & Dick Giordano, two of Larry's first inkers.

I EXPECTED IT TO BE JUST A CUTE KID'S COMIC — BUT I WAS WRONG!
I EXPECTED IT TO BE JUST A PARODY AND I WAS WRONG!
I EXPECTED IT TO EXPLORE THE RAMIFICATIONS OF THE SUPERHERO GENRE, FOCUSING ON ITS ADOLESCENT POWER FIXATIONS.
BOY, WAS I WRONG!

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"I was a bad guy on M*A*S*H. . ."

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plore all the avenues." I figured what they wanted was a spear-carrier or something, so I walked in and what they put in front of me was an Equity Principal's Contract. And I thought, "Gee, the money is pretty good and I have employment at least until opening night."*(Laughter.)* What the heck. It seemed like a great experience, so I did it. So I pretty much made a living as an actor off of that for about a year.

JIM: *What was the name of the play?*

LARRY: PACIFIC OVERTURES.

DWIGHT: *And the part that you played?*

LARRY: I was about three different bad guys. I got the part because he said I looked classically Japanese, right? My major part was Lt. Williams in the United States Navy, which I played in a red beard and a red wig! *(Laughter.)* I was also the evil lord of the south and a gangster. All I ever got to be *ever* was bad guys. But I got into Actors Equity and eventually got into the Screen Actors Guild. But there, working in that environment — I was working with, really, some of the best people in that *genre* of theater.

JIM: *The play won a Tony, didn't it?*

LARRY: Yeah. It won a few Tonys. And, you know, we previewed in Boston and we did a month in Washington, the Kennedy Center, and then we opened on Broadway, and then we took it on the road to San Francisco and Los Angeles. But working with really top professionals you learn ten times more. That's one thing that I'm always grateful about. I was extremely lucky, you know, to work with really good people on a lot of these things, comics included. I mean, the first people that inked my pencils were **Ralph Reese, Wally Wood, Neal Adams, Dick Giordano** and **Klaus Janson.** I was very lucky!

DWIGHT: *You had a small part in a M*A*S*H once, didn't you?*

LARRY: Yeah, I did. I was a bad guy on M*A*S*H, sort of an evil North Korean. I got to kidnap Frank Burns and try to take him into North Korea. And I did a spot on SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE with **Martin Sheen.** I got to be abusive and eat chicken, you know. *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *The APOCALYPSE NOW take-off?*

LARRY: Right. That was a lot of fun. You know, I didn't do an awful lot of stuff, but at least I got to work on stuff that was the best of what it was at the time. Those were my only two TV credits.

DWIGHT: *Why did you get back into comics? Did the acting work dry up?*

LARRY: What happened was that I came back to New York and I'd never given up my desk space at Continuity. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *You were still paying the $50 a month?*

SCOTT FREE
WAS BORN A GOD OF NEW GENESIS, BUT GIVEN TO MANKIND AS THE WARD OF DARKSEID, DEATHMASTER OF APOKOLIPS! IN TIME, HE ESCAPED THAT PLANET OF DARKNESS AND FLED TO EARTH--AND THERE, TO SURVIVE, HE TOOK UP THE PROFESSION OF ESCAPE ARTISTRY, A UNIQUE PAST, YES!--LEADING TO A UNIQUE FUTURE! FOR ALL THE GODS AND MEN IN THE UNIVERSE, THERE IS ONLY ONE--
MISTER MIRACLE
STEVE GERBER WRITER
MICHAEL GOLDEN ARTIST
JOE GIELLA INKER
BEN ODA LETTERER
D.R. MARTIN COLORIST
LARRY HAMA EDITOR
A FLICK OF THE GUT STONY HERE'S ALL IT TAKES FOR DARKSEID TO SEND SCOTT FREE HURTLING EVEN FARTHER FROM APOKOLIPS TO--
AS THOS IS MY JUDGE...!
ORLIVION?
IS THIS WHERE GOOD GO WHEN THEY DIE?
"GOOD QUESTION," SCOTT MUTTERS TO HIMSELF, AND THEN WAITS SILENTLY FOR AN ANSWER WHICH SURELY IS NOT FORTHCOMING.
OH, WELL... MIGHT AS WELL RELAX AND ENJOY THE RIDE, WHATEVER ITS DESTINATION!
TO BE CONTINUED

LARRY: I think it went up to, like, $75 or $100 or something. But, you know, I had all of my stuff there, and I always basically saw myself as an artist, not as anything else. It was one thing that I knew how to do and I knew I could make a living doing, so that's what I basically went back to doing. It was bread and butter. Other actors wait on tables. Somewhere along the line I got. . . they were looking for new editors at DC. **Al Milgrom** and I both got hired to be editors at DC. That was a pretty enjoyable stay. I have no animosities towards anybody there.

DWIGHT: *Which books did you work on?*

LARRY: I worked on WONDER WOMAN; SUPER FRIENDS; WELCOMC BACK, KOTTER — which was very popular at the time *(Laughter.)* — CLAW; JONAH HEX; WARLORD; and MISTER MIRACLE. That was a lot of fun, working with those guys. We had a newcomer, a guy by the name of **Michael Golden.** Both Al and I just went crazy about his stuff. Some of the other editors complained that he drew the heads too big. They just sort of saw his stuff as being too cartoony. But you would look at his pages and just go, "Wow! This guy is tremendous!" Both Al and I tried to go out of our way to get him and inkers that not only would complement his stuff but, like, help him along. I think Al got **Craig Russell** to ink a bunch of BATMAN stuff. I somehow talked **Russ Heath** into inking some MISTER MIRACLEs — I don't know *how* I did that. *(Laughter.)*And it seemed like Mike just took that stuff home with him. I think when he saw what Russ did with his MISTER MIRACLEs. . . he's one of those guys that is a learning machine. He looks at stuff and analyzes it and understands how it works. He's working for me on THE 'NAM book for Marvel. . . we have a lot of difficulties fin-

"I can identify with Daredevil better than

SPIDER-MAN TICKLES THE TORCH
SPIDER-MAN
A SPIDER-MAN SURPRISE EXTRA!
THERE'S THE HUMAN TORCH, I'VE GOT TO TELL HIM THAT I'VE DISCOVERED THAT WE'RE ONLY COMIC BOOK CHARACTERS; HE ALSO OWES ME 3 DOLLARS.
THIS THOUGHT BALLOON IS TOTALLY UNNECESSARY.
JOHNNY STORM, WHY ARE YOU DRIVING A CAR THAT IS SO OLD?
LOOK, I DIDN'T USE MY DEODORANT THIS MONTH!
YEAH, IT MUST BE FROM 1965
IT IS. THIS IS A REPRINT OF AN OLD STORY, THAT'S WHY.
WRITTEN BY: MARC BILGREY (WITH APOLOGIES TO STAN LEE) DRAWN BY: JACK KIRBY INKED BY: STEVE DITKO LETTERED BY: JOE ALBELO
WHY AM I ALWAYS A WALK ON? I'M A STAR AND IT'S ABOUT TIME SOMEONE NOTICED!

Larry & his CRAZY cohorts take a priceless poke at rewriting a Stan & Jack classic.

ding reference photos of artillery pieces in action. We tried sending him, like, two or three really foggy photos, and he came to me and said, "Look, all I have to do is see it work. If I can understand how it works then I can draw it from almost any angle." And I believe that. Really amazing guy.

JIM: *Somewhere in all of this, weren't you in the Service?*

LARRY: Yeah. I got drafted. I was doing shoes for Sears catalogues and it was one of those things where I kept getting a deferment and then one day, you know, I went down there and they were taking everybody. It was a weird time.

JIM: *Which branch were you in?*

LARRY: I was in the Army. I spent a lot of time being in headquarters companies doing some pretty weird stuff. But it's an experience that. . . I don't think that it made me any more weirdly paramilitary than anybody else. You know, I always had a fascination with certain types of things, anyway. It's not something I regret.

I regret my teenage indolence more. *(Laughter.)* It's like when you're eighteen years old, seventeen years old, hanging out on the street corner thinking this is where it's at. If I had been sitting there, like, drawing, it would have been better. I regret not pushing myself earlier, in drawing, and not experiencing those whitelight breakthroughs until much later. I think you sit there, guys who pencil, sit at the drawing board and you want each thing you're doing to be perfect, somehow. It makes you slow because to finish something and have it be bad is just very depressing; whereas, the only way to get any better is to just do volumes of stuff and make all of your mistakes. That's my true regret. I wish I'd spent more time sitting there drawing. It's a source of frustration now when I sit here and think, "Oh, my God, how do I do this?" It should be easier for me at this point.

Then you hear from guys who have been doing it for, like, 40 years, "It never gets easier! It's always hard!" *(Laughter.)* Woody used to say, sitting at the board, he would turn around and go, "You know, comic-book artists don't retire. You just die at the drawing board." *(Laughter.)* I was 22 years old! My God, this is not the right thing to be telling me! *(Laughter.)* He hit all the right triggers. I've been very fortunate to have been associated with a lot of really good talents in this business.

DWIGHT: *Well, now that you're editing THE 'NAM book and working on the G.I. JOE books, has the Army experience benefited you?*

LARRY: Yeah. Anything that cuts down on your research is good. *(Laughter.)* I mean, there's a lot of stuff that I obviously do have to keep researching and keep up on, you know. Stuff has changed. I plow through stuff like this *(points out a technical manual on rifle squads, mechanized and light infantry)*. Really technical stuff. I try to keep up, but everything has changed completely: the uniforms, the equipment, the terminology. It takes a lot of effort to keep up on this stuff. You can't just rely on the old stuff because the technology has just, you know, changed so much. It's difficult for me to comprehend how some of this stuff works.

JIM: *It seems you have a passion for all of this type of stuff in the books you edit and write. It seems like you truly enjoy them all.*

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a guy who shoots beams from his eyes."

EIGHT HOURS LATER...
HE'S A PYROMANIAC AND I'M A PEEPING TOM.
HMMM MMMM MMMM MMMM MMMM. I GOT AN IDEA.
SINCE HE'S GOT A FIRE, I'LL MAKE A NET, CATCH SOME FISH AND FRY 'EM.
INSIDE, THE TORCH USES HIS POWER TO TEACH BALLET...
THIS FLAME WILL MAKE YOU DANCE.
IT HURTS SO GOOD, OH JOHNNY, OH JOHNNY!

LARRY: Hey, you know, I'm into gadgets. I like loud guitars and fast cars and bigbore handguns. I don't think that's the primary appeal of the books, though. You got a few gadget freaks out there that are really into "is that the right machine gun" or the "right" tank or the "right" motorcycle or whatever — but that's not going to sell the book. You still really have to have a solid story and likeable, good characters.

JIM: *Yeah, but I think you prefer what you're doing over, say, editing FANTASTIC FOUR or other superhero stuff.*

LARRY: See, the thing is that I would approach superheroes in a different way. One of the first comic-book jobs I did was IRON FIST — I think I did the second and third and fourth issues. I took it over from **Gil Kane**. It was like a strange cross-over, a sort of Kung-Fu superhero. There are a bunch of superheroes that Marvel has that are sort of borderline. They're not quite superheroes. They're more understandable in how they do what they do. Daredevil, for instance, is a prime example. He's not a mutant. That's a character that I've been able to do on occasion because I can identify with that better than a guy who can shoot beams out of his eyes. You know, I guess it's because I don't believe a man can fly. *(Laughter.)* I think there's more drama to be had out of situations with a person who has limitations.

JIM: *Let's backtrack a little. After DC, where did you go next? CRAZY Magazine?*

LARRY: Yeah. Should I talk about the DC implosion? *(Laughter.)* Actually, you know, Al and I were imploded simultaneously. We were the last hired so we were the first imploded. *(Laughter.)* I just rebounded back to Continuity. Al came pretty much straight over to Marvel. After

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I FIGURED IT WOULD CONFUSE YOU. I'M HERE TO TALK PHILOSOPHY AND COLLECT MY 2 BUCKS.
I'M BROKE AND I'M BUSY.
WHY IS IT THAT ALL THE GIRL'S HAIR-DO'S ARE 15 YEARS OLD?
HE'S RIGHT!
I WOULDN'T KNOW, I'M A PREPPY.
AND I'M CROSS EYED.

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—Stan Lee

"Well done! Bravo!"
—Ray Bradbury

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—Amazing Heroes

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"In high school, CONAN blew me away."

about, I don't know, six or eight months, Al called me and said, "Hey, look, they're talking about revamping CRAZY. Why don't you come over and have lunch?" And so I came over and talked to Al and talked to **Shooter** and came up with a game plan and I dived right into doing a funny book, that was really — when I was a kid I had been a total MAD freak — that was really one big fantasy fulfillment, to run CRAZY. The whole idea of having my own humor magazine, you know, to play with and work up and do something with, that was terrific! I had a lot of fun. Good times.

JIM: *Well, from that, you shifted to SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN. How was the transition?*

LARRY: The transition was pretty smooth. I was pretty familiar with all of the **Howard** material. I think I discovered **Robert E. Howard** when I was in high school, before the paperbacks came out. I used to haunt my local public library in Queens. I had gone through their entire science-fiction section and had somehow stumbled across these books that nobody seemed interested in. One was a CONAN hardcover. I opened it up, you know, and even the way it was printed just blew my mind. There on the first page in this big type it said, "The King of India lay dying..." I remember this distinctly! *(Laughter.)* It blew me away! I read the first story just standing there in the stacks, and spent a futile search trying to dig up other **Howard** stuff. And then one day years later *Whammo!* — it's in paperback. I just, you know, ate it all up! I loved that stuff! I loved all that **Fritz Lieber** stuff, too. **Poul Anderson**. All those guys.

DWIGHT: *What was the condition of CONAN when you took over?*

LARRY: The condition? *(Laughter.)* It's hard to say. I think that everybody that comes to it, you know, gives their own interpretation of it. Obviously, there's a world of difference between the **Barry Smith** CONAN and the **John Buscema** CONAN — both of which are very valid — because they both saw really different things in it. I think Barry was very concerned with the world of it and John was more concerned with this hulking, brooding characterization of Conan.

DWIGHT: *Well, have you talked with Barry about doing a new CONAN story?*

LARRY: No, I really haven't. I don't know if the time is right. I would love to see him do one. I would love to see **Roy Thomas** write another one. *(Laughter.)* It's just the mechanics of going about it, because I think that comics and magazines are very dependent on continuity and everything. Somebody stepping in and do-

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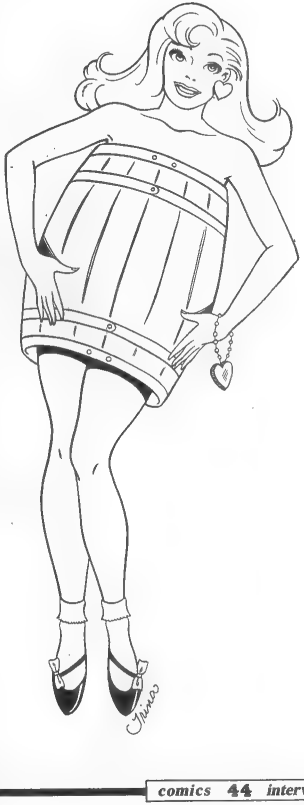
"For fifteen years or so the entire



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ing one issue or four issues or something might be beneficial to it on a very short term basis, but I think you need a long-term commitment from a lot of different parties concerned to do something really well. You're talking about a guy spending years doing one character, and if you look back you can see that that's a very prominent pattern. The stuff that stands up is the stuff that somebody stuck at for years, or one team stuck at for a long period of time.

You don't get to know a comic-book character or team characters in one issue. Your knowledge and your appreciation of characters in comics is cumulative. You learn something about the guy in this issue and six months later you pick up something else and it all sort of blends together. That's natural. It's like getting to know a real person over a long period of time. That is part and parcel with your appreciation of it. It takes time for people to get acclimated to something.

DWIGHT: *What keeps you in comics?*

LARRY: I like to tell stories. I think the key is being into it and liking it and believing in it, more so than any amount of technical expertise or chops or what-have-you. There are people around who can draw incredibly well. They are incredible draftsmen. They're not necessarily the most popular storytellers or artists, and a lot of guys who are very popular are not really very technically proficient as draftsmen. They're just incredibly sincere and into the stories they tell. That's the bottom line. I think the great majority of the actual consumers of the primary product really can't tell the difference between three given artists. What they can sense is whether or not somebody is into it. When somebody is *really into it* then you're willing to completely overlook any flaws in proportion, or rendering, or stiffness, or what-have-you, because they're delivering the goods. The Tinkerbell Syndrome is what you call it. If you stop believing in Tinkerbell, then she dies. That's why you can't really judge comic books by any sort of yardstick that takes into consideration the finesse in the artwork or the wonderful structure of the words or whatever. It's the impact of the whole, put together as an entertainment.

You know, everything is subjective, of course. In a way, the comics industry is very much like a small town where everyone knows each other. You become sort of familiar in a way and, you know, you garner your enjoyment from whatever facet you can. Some people may be very difficult to work with, but they may do exemplary work, and somebody who may be a real dream to deal with — like, their stuff may be just okay. It's fine. It doesn't, like,

comic-book industry gave up on girls."

make your heart sing, you know, but the guy is totally efficient, dependable, likeable. There's always a trade-off. It's too small a family, or like a clique, to be cuttin' down somebody. There's obviously stuff, material, that I really love, and stuff that I'm not really that crazy about — but somebody out there must like it. Everybody has different tastes.

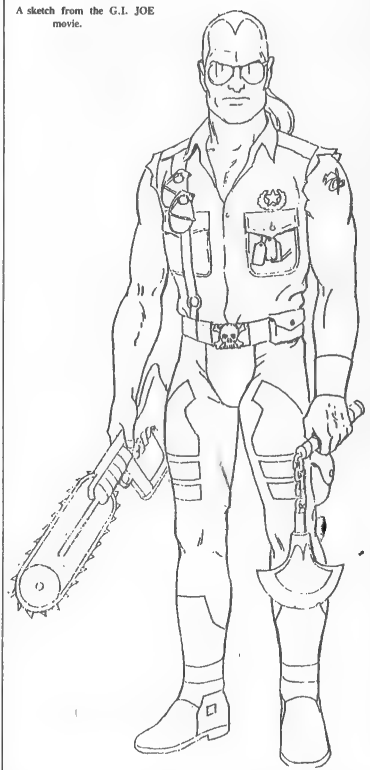
The only thing I really object to is people putting down a book or a concept just on the basis that they don't like the groundwork of the concept, without even reading it. There's stuff out there that's extremely popular with the fans that I can't comprehend at all, that doesn't appeal to my sensibilities, but at the same time I can understand why a certain segment of the readership likes it. That stuff *should* be out there. But I think that we have to make comics accessible to a lot more people. There's whole segments of the reading population out there that we don't reach, because we just don't *do* anything for them. For, like, ten or fifteen years or so, the entire comic-book industry gave up on girls. We're just not going to make comic books that appeal to girls anymore. That's half your readership! *(Laughter.)* That's very silly. And there are kids out there that like different types of comics other than superheroes. They got ignored for a long period of time!

I think we should do anything that we can to branch out. I think that we're at a real crossroads in comics. The potential is there in the medium to really grow and to reach a much bigger segment of the population! In the '40s a much bigger percentage of kids actually read comic books. Part of that, I really feel, has to do with the comics of the '40s having a slightly more universal appeal. That's something worth striving for.

DWIGHT: *Well, G.I. JOE is an example of a different type of comic book that has succeeded.*

LARRY: Yeah. And I don't think stuff has to be in the line of a G.I. JOE to work like that. It shows how we should be taking advantage of any toe-hold into other media forms, you know, like with TV or toys or commercials or something. But, I mean, the girls that would want to buy MISTY, for instance, aren't used to going and looking in the comic-book racks, so you're immediately damaging yourself if you don't find some way to let them know it's there. And if you don't keep something out there, then they'll *never* notice it! And there still is resistance to G.I. JOE at the retail level, mainly because shops happen to be run by fans. They, like, sit around and discourage kids from buying it! *(Laughter.)* What can you do?

A sketch from the G.I. JOE movie.



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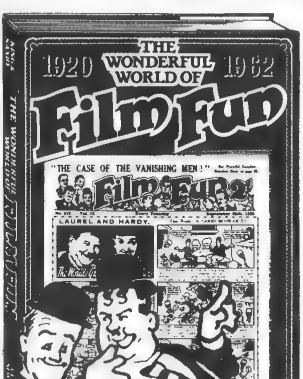
A Classic of British Comic Art



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"I was a trainee on LADY & THE TRAMP."

Photo by Floyd Norman

WILLIE ITO

Willie Ito has had a varied and interesting career as an animator and a cartoonist. He is also a dedicated comic-book and popular-culture collector. This interview took place in a Disney Studios breakroom . . .

KEN JONES: *Something I am personally interested in is the very unusual comic called the WHAM-O GIANT COMIC BOOK.*

WILLIE ITO: I worked very closely with **Dan Noonan,** who was one of the top layout people in the animation business. He also worked very closely with **Walt Kelly** and **Moe Gollub** on the old **Oscar Lebeck** line of comic books, which happens to be the ANIMAL COMICS and the **Walt Kelly** special books like MOTHER GOOSE. I guess Wham-O at that time decided to try something uniquely different, the giant-size comic. A lot of the cartoonists didn't sign their true name to it, but they are very well-known prominent cartoonists and I am sure that fans of the medium will recognize their styles. I guess to me it didn't matter. I had fun doing the book and I am sorry it wasn't successful.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Willie Ito
Born: 17 July 1934 — San Francisco, CA
Residence: Monterey Park, CA
Training: Chouinards-Art Institute, Los Angeles
Credits: Animation — Warner Bros., Bob Clampett, Hanna-Barbera, etc. Publishing — Petersen Publishing, Walt Disney Productions, Marvel, Western Publishing, WHAM-O GIANT COMICS, Whitman
Hobbies: Collecting Disneyana

KEN: *I noticed the name Ward Kimball in the credits — is that the Ward Kimball of Disney Studios?*

WILLIE: It could possibly have been, because **Dan Noonan** was a close friend of Ward's, but I can't remember — so don't quote me on that! Did Ward do a strip in that book?

KEN: *I believe he was a liaison for the artists.*

WILLIE: He might have been instrumental in getting artists from Disney Studios to work on that project, because the Wham-O Company was in the San Gabriel Valley, which is where **Ward Kimball** lives. Also, the art department for the Wham-O Company was there, so that might be the connection.

KEN: *Where does your comic-book work fit into all this, chronologically?*

WILLIE: I guess during the time I was at Chouinard's, we would occasionally get representatives from Western Publishing

"I headed up Bob Clampett's layout depart-

who were soliciting young artists, writers and whatever. I thought that they might be interested in seeing some of my comic-book work. I started doing some cover ideas for **Chase Craig** of Western Publishing. Meanwhile, during that period, one of the **Harvey** brothers came out here looking for artists, so I tried my hand at some of the BABY HUEY work. It was about that same period when I started to do animation work that I got involved in comic books, too.

KEN: *Why don't you name some of your credits as a comic-book creator?*

WILLIE: I did a lot of pencilling on BABY HUEY, did a lot of work on the FLINTSTONES and YOGI BEAR comics, some cover ideas for LOONEY TUNES. After I left Warners (I was there for six years), **Bob Clampett** started up his BEANY AND CECIL project, so I went over there and headed up his layout department. Then I got involved in a lot of character merchandising for **Clampett**, at which time I continued doing comic-book work for his BEANY AND CECIL comic books and coloring books. Basically, my work in comic books was done in anonymity because I worked for Western Publishing. I was one of the artists on the original CAR-TOONS for Petersen Publishing. I worked on that for a few years. I was also a contributing cartoonist to various Petersen Publishing car magazines. I also did Letters-to-the-Editor illustrations for a couple years for MOTOR TREND magazine. I also contributed to CAR CRAFT and their teen magazines. At Marvel, I collaborated with **Bob Foster** on CRAZY MAGAZINE.

KEN: *What do you do for Disney now?*

WILLIE: I am now in the character merchandising division. I do pencilling on the CHRISTMAS TREASURY OF CLASSICS. We ghost a lot of things when a regular artist is sick, like on WINNIE THE POOH. I just recently did the presentation strip based on GUMMI BEARS, Disney's new Saturday morning animation show. I also do a lot of publication material that we produce for our clients, like the Disney Encyclopedia series. Then occasionally I do a comic-book thing for one of our European publishers. I have done work for Western and Whitman Publishing. I did a lot of covers for the Western Comics — Gold Key — and for Whitman I did a lot of coloring books and story books.

KEN: *What do you think about Gladstone Comics, the new publishers of Disney Comics?*

WILLIE: I am very glad they're taking up where Western left off.

KEN: *What about comic books, Willie — what do you think of them today?*

WILLIE: I would like to see more interesting comic books, like they had in the Golden Age. I think that because comic books have to compete so heavily with TV that's probably one of the reasons why the readership is down so much. I can understand why publishers are forced to fill the comic books with ads and print them on very poor-quality paper. If the industry could go back to where the printing was better and you didn't have so many ads, then kids might want to spend one dollar on a comic book. Right now, it's not worth their hard-earned money.

KEN: *Willie, how did you become interested in cartooning, comic strips, comic books, and animation?*

WILLIE: I guess I've always had an interest in cartooning from way back, but I think it really festered about age eight. This was during World War II, when we were incarcerated in relocation camps. Kids had plenty of time to draw, because we had no distractions like radio or TV. So we did a lot of drawings and things like that to occupy our time. That's when my interest in comic-book cartooning really started. Going way back to the first time I saw SNOW WHITE or FERDINAND THE BULL, I just felt cartooning was what I wanted to get into. I collected Walt Disney comic books from issue #1, because of my interest in cartooning and especially **Walt Disney** — so, to this day, fortunately, I have every Disney comic book from issue #1.

"At Marvel, I collaborated with Bob Foster on CRAZY magazine."

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ment on his BEANY & CECIL project."

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KEN: *So what was your first professional break?*

WILLIE: I finished San Francisco City College in two years. I took art courses and my instructor there thought that maybe I should come down to Southern California and try for a working art scholarship at Chouinard Art Institute. So I packed my portfolio with me and I thought just for a lark I would try to see the inside of Walt Disney Studios. I went to the studio and had an interview and, about two months later, I received a telegram at the rooming house I was staying at — there were no telephones there — that said, "Come and report to the studio for employment at such and such a date."

KEN: *What was your first job with Disney?*

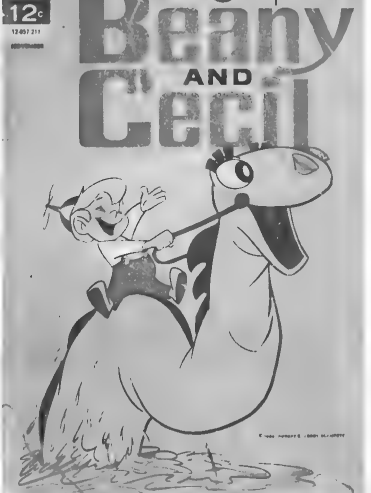
WILLIE: I was an in-betweener, apprentice trainee on LADY AND THE TRAMP. Ironically, the very first scene I was assigned to work on was the very famous spaghetti kissing scene. I was assigned to put on half numbers. In other words, the in-betweening was already done, but the animators felt that the action should be slowed down. So I got this stack of drawings and had to put -half numbers in-between the images. It was rather a tedious way to break into this business.

KEN: *What did you do after that project?*

WILLIE: After LADY AND THE TRAMP was completed, I went to Warner Brothers. I left Disney on a Friday and started there the following Monday, down in what was known as Termite Junction, at the old Warner Brothers Studios. I worked in the in-betweener's bullpen over there, but fortunately I worked with one of the top animators of the time, **Ken Harris**, who was one of **Chuck Jones'** unit. After about four months of working in **Chuck Jones'** unit as an assistant, the Disney Studio called me again, because they were gearing up for SLEEPING BEAUTY — but I felt that my career was rolling at Warner's, so I said no to their offer.

KEN: *Let's talk about your Disneyana collection.*

WILLIE: Primarily, I started collecting Disney comic books because of my particular interest in **Walt Disney** — but also, in general, I was interested in anything pertaining to animation. I also went very heavily into collecting the LOONEY TUNES comic books, NEW FUNNIES, and basically all of the Dell line of comic books. Then, of course, like everybody else I discovered **Carl Barks** and started collecting his DONALD DUCK and UNCLE SCROOGE. Of course, **Walt Kelly** was one of my all-time favorites. I've got all of his SANTA CLAUS FUNNIES and MOTHER GOOSE comic books and OUR



GANG comics and the early POGO, so consequently I still own a large collection of Dell Comics, all of the Disneys and almost a complete collection of the LOONEY TUNES and NEW FUNNIES, POPULAR COMICS. I never was much of a fan of superhero comics so my collection doesn't include those type of books. It's all funny-animal things, though any of the adventure titles that were published under the Dell line like DICK TRACY and POPULAR COMICS and things of that nature, I still have. Toys were something that I'd had as a child, but they got thrown out when they got damaged. My interest in toys re-festered in the last twenty years. I was very heavily into collecting the Disneyana from the '30s, but when you end up working at Disney your collection also starts to include all of the current collectibles, souvenir items and commemorative items. I am still very actively collecting. The old classic things are right out of price range now for, I am sure, a lot of collectors — fortunately, the things that I do have, I collected before the skyrocketing prices. I went to flea markets and little out-of-the-way antique stores and goodwill stores. I managed to find a lot of treasures that way.

KEN: *You've actually had a lot of your Disneyana collection displayed in very prestigious places.*

WILLIE: Through **Jerry Muheler**, I loaned about fifty pieces to the Bowers Museum in Santa Ana, California, for their exhibit commemorating Mickey Mouse's 50th birthday. I've had a collection of three hundred of my pieces touring Japan for six months to coincide with the opening of Disneyland in Tokyo, Japan, too.

"George Lucas said 'Listen — If you're

GLORIA KATZ

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If Chico Marx was alive today to ask his most memorable question — "Why a duck?" — he would find that there is somebody ready to give him a less flippant response than he got from his cigar-chomping brother. Or maybe not. That somebody is, of course, Gloria Katz, screenwriter and movie producer, whose most recent film is guaranteed some very strong interest — at least among comics fans. I, personally, am ever so curious about it. I really have to wonder how anybody could conceive of doing a live-action HOWARD THE DUCK.

But then again, Gloria Katz brings with her some enviable credentials, including a degree from UCLA's film school. Together with her husband, Willard Huyck, she has written the scripts for many well-received motion pictures, among them LUCKY LADY, AMERICAN GRAFFITI (1973 Academy Award nominee for best original screenplay) and INDIANA JONES AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM. The latter two involved working with their friend George Lucas, who once brought them a new comic book and asked them to take a look at it because it was so off the wall, weird and witty, and thus setting off an incredible chain of events that eventually led to . . . well, you know.

That's pretty much all there is to say. Gloria will fill you in on the rest of it, I promise. As for Chico's question, you might recall that the rest of it went, "Why not a chicken? Or a horse?" or something like that. Because it's there . . .

DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN: *When George Lucas passed you the HOWARD comics and suggested doing a HOWARD movie, what was your initial response?*

GLORIA KATZ: Well, it didn't exactly happen like that with him suggesting doing a HOWARD movie. First of all, all of this happened years ago. It started with George's comic-book store, where he had a lot of original comic-book art. One day, while we were at work on RADIOLAND MURDERS — a movie that was just never made — he brought back with him this new comic book that he felt we would really like because the sensibility in the comic book, the kind of sense of humor that **Steve Gerber** has, is very similar to our own. So then we said, "Let's make it into a

ever interested just contact me...”

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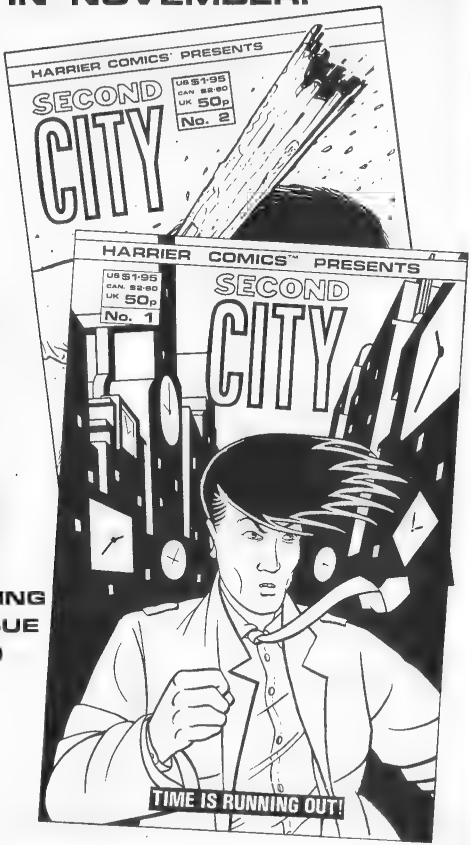

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"It's a real nightmare . . . very costly."

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movie!" *(Laughter.)* But the rights were not available. Nor was there any technology available to make it into a movie. So then time passed, and about three years ago we called up Marvel on our own and asked if the rights were available. At that time the rights had reverted back from Universal — who had bought the whole Marvel package — and Marvel was very nice and gave us a free option on it so that we could just run with it and try to develop it into a movie. Then, when we had written several versions of the script and we realized how complicated it was to develop HOWARD and that George had expertise in this area — and he had told me, he said, "Listen, if you're ever interested in me coming aboard, just contact me, because I was always interested in this project" — so we call George back and that's how he became involved again as executive producer on HOWARD.

DWIGHT: *Why would you want to do a HOWARD movie? By that I mean what can film do for the story that, you know, couldn't be done in the comic books or that would, like, enhance or advance what's already there?*

GLORIA: Well, the movie enables you to enrich your character, to make Howard a somewhat more complicated character, and we were able to people it with, you know, more three-dimensional people than you're able to have in a comic book. I mean, we kept Howard and we kept Beverly, and then we essentially created our own series of adventures that Howard goes on. The movie essentially keeps within the spirit of the comic book. Howard starts out, lands on earth, he starts to try to change his lifestyle to, you know, accommodate being a duck out of water; and then for some reason he gets involved in an adventure that is mythic, larger than life, that proves his courage and, you know, his true status as a comic-book hero. Howard is sort of everyduck who in spite of his neuroticism is able to be truly brave and truly courageous.

DWIGHT: *The mechanical Howards themselves, how difficult were they . . .*

GLORIA: We never think of Howard as mechanical. Howard is the result of a lot of casting efforts to find a duck from outer space. HOWARD is the first movie cast with a true alien. A womanizing alien. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *Who is doing the voice of Howard?*

GLORIA: Howard is all integral. Howard is all of a piece.

DWIGHT: *Okay. I talked with Steve Gerber a couple of weeks ago about the HOWARD movie. He mentioned that you and he had a meeting to talk about it. What*

were your feelings going into that meeting? Were you perhaps a little uncomfortable at meeting the guy who created it in the first place?

GLORIA: Well, first of all, I expected him to be much different. For some reason I expected him to be, like, 20 years old. *(Laughter.)* I didn't expect him to be a grown-up. *(Laughter.)* No, but actually he's a very, very sweet guy. He has a great sense of humor. He's very warm, so you immediately like him and, you know, he's the only other person that's lived with Howard as long as we have. It was a very comfortable meeting.

DWIGHT: *I take it he got really excited with the plans you had in the script and all?*

GLORIA: Yes. He really enjoyed the script and he has since been very supportive.

DWIGHT: *In earlier versions of the script did you show more of Howard's world than what we're going to ultimately see?*

GLORIA: No. In earlier versions of the script we actually didn't show *any* of Howard's world. Then we had one flashback. And then when we started we thought, instead of having a brief flashback, maybe we should start the picture on Howard's world. We've done a little bit on Howard's world and, you know, we set up what kind of character Howard is through

Photo by Peter Sorel

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"I would love to see HOWARD go on to a

Trapped in a world he never made.
TO FIGHT THE KILLER ELITE, YOU'D HAVE TO BE CRAZY.
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COMICS INTERVIEW
HOWARD THE DUCK
More adventure than humanly possible.
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that, and then we have him blast through the Universe. I would like to do a story on Howard's world but it's, you know, very costly. We had to build all these duck streets to scale and everything. It's a real nightmare. Everything for Howard has to be built to Howard's scale, and Howard is only 38 inches high.

DWIGHT: *How were the actors in responding to Howard? Were there any unusual situations that were kind of funny or difficult?*

GLORIA: Well, I think the actors who worked with Howard tried to make him as real as possible, and that's really the trick. If they believe so strongly in Howard then you believe in Howard. **Lea Thompson**'s tremendously sincere in her performance. No, it wasn't actually very difficult at all. Everyone just loved Howard.

DWIGHT: *What scene in the movie do you think really captures the essence of Howard?*

GLORIA: It's really hard to say. All the scenes sort of do 'cause all of them show different aspects of him. You know, you start with Howard in his apartment and you feel his sort of frustration with being stuck — we changed this from the comic books — he's an advertising copywriter and he's sort of unhappy with his life. He's waiting for something else to happen. And then, you know, when he meets Beverly you see sort of his neurotic side, and then when he gets involved in his bigger-than-life adventure you see his heroic side.

DWIGHT: *So we see Howard actually grow as...*

GLORIA: You see Howard develop, yes.

DWIGHT: *Is Cleveland really as bad as Howard believes it is?*

GLORIA: Well, we don't make as many Cleveland jokes as the comic books do. One or two. *(Laughter.)*

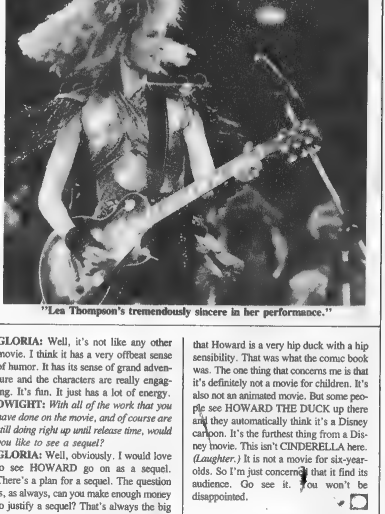
DWIGHT: *What do you think is the biggest difference between the movie HOWARD and the comic-book HOWARD?*

GLORIA: The comic book is really, you know, when it gets involved with its villains, very, very unrealistic. Now, I wouldn't say that we're entirely realistic, but we do have more of a realistic framework. We don't go as farcical or as campy as the comic books.

DWIGHT: *Or as satirical?*

GLORIA: Well, no — we are still satirical. But we are more realistic, you know, although we still have highly fanciful elements. It's just a different...it's just not as broad.

DWIGHT: *The multi-million dollar leading question is, of course, what does the HOWARD movie have that people will want to pay money to see?*



"Lea Thompson's tremendously sincere in her performance."

GLORIA: Well, it's not like any other movie. I think it has a very offbeat sense of humor. It has its sense of grand adventure and the characters are really engaging. It's fun. It just has a lot of energy.

DWIGHT: *With all of the work that you have done on the movie, and of course are still doing right up until release time, would you like to see a sequel?*

GLORIA: Well, obviously. I would love to see HOWARD go on as a sequel. There's a plan for a sequel. The question is, as always, can you make enough money to justify a sequel? That's always the big if. But, you know, if all goes well I'd love to do another adventure with Howard.

DWIGHT: *What's been the reaction of other people in the movie industry who have seen, like, the rough cut?*

GLORIA: We've had very good reaction to the film from people who have seen it in the rough cut, but we're also missing a lot of opticals at this point. We've had a very good response for such an extremely strange movie. *(Laughter.)* It's not your normal movie.

DWIGHT: *What I was driving at is — do they regard it as something fresh or unique rather than, you know, something derivative...*

GLORIA: Well, I hope they...you know, HOWARD is both fresh and unique but it also plays with some of the conventions of comic books. I want people to understand that Howard is a very hip duck with a hip sensibility. That was what the comic book was. The one thing that concerns me is that it's definitely not a movie for children. It's also not an animated movie. But some people see HOWARD THE DUCK up there and they automatically think it's a Disney cartoon. It's the furthest thing from a Disney movie. This isn't CINDERELLA here. *(Laughter.)* It is not a movie for six-year-olds. So I'm just concerned that it find its audience. Go see it. You won't be disappointed.

"...I opened up this store as a hobby

BILL LIEBOWITZ

Funny how something right under your nose and familiar can take on a new value when you get to dig deeper. I guess we all should dig deeper with those in our lives. I certainly discovered a great deal by interviewing the founder and owner of Los Angeles' Golden Apple Bookstores...

SHEL DORF: *Bill, what did you do before you ran the comic-book stores?*

BILL LIEBOWITZ: Well, I'm a C.P.A. graduate of U.C.L.A., and I worked for Touche, Ross, and Company — for thirteen years. It's a large international accounting firm, and I did audits of Litton Industries and people like that. I left that company to run a very large real estate development company called Trizec, which built high-rise office buildings. We developed office buildings and shopping centers in the United States, and I ran that company for eight years in Los Angeles — it's a Canadian company, and I ran the United States subsidiary. In Los Angeles, for example, we built three-million square feet of office space. Then I went through my mid-life crisis and I decided that I didn't want to do that anymore, and all that time I had been interested in comics and collecting, and I'd opened up this store as a hobby — just a place to go on weekends.

SHEL: *You were born in 1941, which is just about the time that Superman and Batman were also born, give or take a year or three. About at what age were you first conscious that there were comic books? Do you remember the first comic book you bought?*

BILL: We have a picture of me in the house — I must be about six years old, and I'm holding a funny-animal comic of some sort — a crow with a cowboy hat on, but you can't see the title of it, and I've never been able to find out the name of it — it might be FOX AND CROW. But I always was the kid on the block with the biggest comic-book collection. I had all the HUMAN TORCHes, and the SUB-MARINER was my favorite, probably when I was eight years old.

SHEL: *Bill, the store that we just left is*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Bill Liebowitz
Born: 18 June 1941 — Brooklyn, New York
Favorite Movie: NIGHT OF THE HUNTER with Robert Mitchum
Favorite President: Teddy Roosevelt
If You Went To A Desert Island, What Two Things Would You Take Along: A copy of "Whispering Bells," by the Del Vikings, and my VCR with a truckload of tapes.
The Most Disgusting Incident That Has Taken Place In One Of Your Stores: The day the guys walked in with the counterfeit copies of CEREBUS #1, or probably the time I found out that I had just bought some.

— just a place to go on weekends."

Badder than Wolverine — BIG BILL LIEBOWITZ WANTS YOU to check out his Northridge, CA, store. Or else.

RICHARD SALA
MITCH MANZER
RAW
GRAPHIC
WORDS & PICTURES
ALEC STEVENS
RAW GRAPHICS BOOKS
R. CRUMB
ALEC STEVENS
DREW FRIEDMAN
RICK GEARY
RICHARD SALA
ALEX TOTH
R.A. LAFFERTY
MITCH MANZER
JUSTIN GREEN
AND MORE
TOTAL $3.50

"Ray Bradbury liked the idea of our store."

on Melrose Avenue, which is becoming very trendy, with new wave clothes, and you're still the kid with the biggest comic-book collection on the block. (Laughter.)

BILL: That is what my wife says — I refuse to grow up. We have two stores — one's on Melrose, and the other one is on Northridge in the San Fernando Valley. We were on Melrose before Melrose was trendy, and it just got trendy around us.

SHEL: *What's been your approach to a retail comic-book store? What makes you — and I will say this without hesitation, you are Mister Showmanship when it comes to comic-book stores — what is your approach, that's made you so successful?*

BILL: Well, comics are supposed to be fun, and I was going into stores where people were interested in how or whether they were going to get a dollar thirty-five or a dollar and a quarter for a back issue, where comics were behind the counter — you couldn't touch them, you could see them — where people didn't give you information about the books that you were buying, they didn't want to sit and *shmooz* with you in the store, and you were sort of relegated to regular customer status, and I thought that the industry offered a lot more than that. They offered a real good chance for an exchange of ideas and for learning about the books for both the customer and owner and also from a creator standpoint. It's a little confusing, let me explain…

SHEL: *It's very clear so far.*

BILL: I think one of the unique things about the industry is the access to the creators, and the idea of being able to sit down with a **Roy Thomas** or a **Frank Miller** in a store or in a convention situation, I think is a great advantage over the almost impossibility of being able to sit down with a **John Huston** or a **Charles Laughton** or something like that. There is no access to these people. But since most of the creators are fans or were fans, they're in comic-book stores, they're in conventions, they're around and readily available. I wanted a store that could bring all these people together, and that's why I've done so many promotions in the past, and had so many creator appearances.

© 1986 MCG

Early Sub-Mariner — Bill's inspiration.

SHEL: *Tell me about your first creator appearance. Do you remember who it was?*

BILL: I think it was probably Roy **Thomas**. Roy lived around the corner from the original Golden Apple store and used to come in, and on our first anniversary I wanted to do something special, and Roy appeared in the store with **Alfredo Alcala**. I think that was probably the first one that we did.

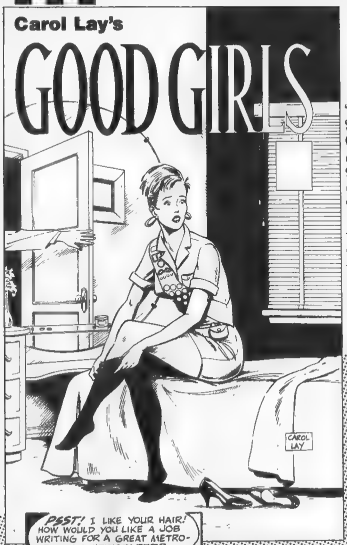
SHEL: *Let's just throw out some of the names who have been in-person guests in your store.*

BILL: Oh my goodness — we've had **George Perez**, Roy, Alfredo, — when the CONAN movie was released we had three weekends of people who were involved in CONAN, including **Ron Cobb, Bil Stout**, the fellow that designed the swords…we've had **Dave Stevens, Mark Evanier** — the whole DNAGENTS crew, **Sergio Aragones, Gil Kane, Paul Smith** and **Chris Claremont** when Paul was taking over the X-MEN. I would think that we've had over one hundred comic-book people at one time or another. We've also had **Ray Bradbury** when he had his dinosaur book out, and he liked the idea that the store was called "Golden Apple" from his GOLDEN APPLES OF THE SUN. We've had movie previews and movie promotions in the store. We've had the entire X-MEN crew at one time or another. We've had, in full costume, barbarians — we've also had Spider-Man and Captain America — trivia contests, you name it. We even had, during our grand opening for the current Golden Apple, we

Carol Lay's

GOOD GIRLS

"It had something to do with her hair..."
She's got the job
(love-lorn columnist for
a great metropolitan newspaper).
She's got the friends
(Ultra-Ma, Stupendo Boy).
She's got the costume, no less).
(covered with hearts,
But she just can't fly!
She's Monica Saunders.
Ms. Lonelyhearts.
Oh, yeah.
She's got the hair,
too.



Find out why they're good.

ON SALE IN NOVEMBER

FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS

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"One of our employees wrote EATING RAOUL."

had a customer appreciation day. We gave out free apple candy and apple punch, and we had red-headed twin girls in spandex outfits giving back massages to our tired customers. A recent thing we did was the DC Fiftieth Anniversary party. We were one of the first places in the country to do that and we were privileged to have **Jack Kirby** come out for that. We got coverage on three television networks and were live on the local CBS channel.

SHEL: *I saw that.*

BILL: And it was picked up by cable and shown all around the country, and Jack was just an exceptional guest. We were looking for a way to have him in the store over the last couple of years, and the DC Fiftieth Anniversary and the new SUPER POWERS stuff seemed to be a natural. So it was a very special day and everyone had a terrific time. We had a cake and Jack wore a party hat.

SHEL: *Are your clerks well versed in the comics? Do they talk the language?*

BILL: **Tony Edwards,** who is the manager, is probably one of the most thorough bodies of knowledge of comic history — he's the kind of guy that if you ask what issue of SPIDER-MAN did Spider-Man rip his costume — he knows all that cold — verbatim. **Scott Prusina,** another one of our clerks, has a pretty good knowledge of DC things, and especially **Kirby** — he's our **Kirby** expert.

SHEL: *How many of these people are creative themselves? Isn't Scott a member of a rock group?*

BILL: Right. Scott fronts a rock group called the **Brooklyn Rats,** and in fact one of our promotions that we did about four months ago was that his group held a benefit for the Statue of Liberty Restoration Fund, and Marvel co-oped that thing, and gave away free CAPTAIN AMERICA comic books, and Captain America made an appearance at the Roxy while the group played, and all the proceeds went to the Statue of Liberty Restoration Fund.

SHEL: *The Roxy is a local club on Sunset Boulevard. Also, didn't you tell me yesterday that a famous movie was actually written in your store?*

BILL: Well, early on, one of our first employees was **Dick Blackburn,** who has written a number of scripts. Probably the most famous is EATING RAOUL, and one of our other customers, **Paul Bartel,** was the star, co-writer, and director of that movie, but I didn't get anything. *(Laughter.)*

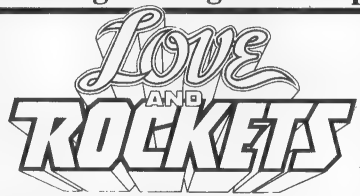
SHEL: *So there is a little bit of Hollywood lore in your store as well?*

BILL: I like to think that we're a meeting place for a lot of the fellas that hap-

Even Mr. Parker got in on the action during Bill's customer appreciation day.

BILL LIEBOWITZ

"Although DNAgents was priced more, in



pen to live around in the area, and we've been very fortunate in that regard. It seems like this is an advantageous place to live, especially with the proximity to Marvel Productions and some of the animation studios in the valley. This seems to attract a lot of people to our store.

SHEL: *What kind of stock do you carry? Can you give me a rundown, because I've found video tapes in your stores, as well as comic books.*

BILL: My attitude toward the store is that I'll stock anything that I like, and that doesn't just have to be comics. We try to broaden our appeal, especially because of our location on Melrose, where we have a lot of non-comic buyers walking in. We have the normal fantasy games and posters and t-shirts, except we have a real expanded line of the t-shirts. We have greeting cards, and we even rent video tapes, although if you're looking for TERMS OF ENDEARMENT you won't find it in our store. If you're looking for SPY SMASHER or BLOODBEAST or 2000 MANIACS, you'll find that in our store. We have a real good inventory of off-the-wall films. We also carry a lot of rock-and-roll things. We're between two major record stores and we do have a lot of importing of Japanese goods. We have a full line of Japanese rock books as well as animation books, and the toys and the robots and that whole crossover seems to work. It really makes the store look neat.

SHEL: *What is the general age group of the customers in your stores?*

BILL: In the Hollywood store, we have an older group of people. I would say that 70% of our customers are between 18 and 35. In the valley, there are probably less people in that age group and more in the 11-to-18 age group, and those are the main TEEN TITANS and X-MEN collectors. In the Hollywood store, for example, we have a very big following for LOVE AND ROCKETS and of course, AMERICAN FLAGG. But AMERICAN FLAGG — we sell one hundred twenty five copies a month of the current thing. We are unable to keep in any of the old LOVE AND ROCKETS — no matter how high I price them, they just go out

SHEL: *I know they're done by Mexican writers and artists — are they also purchased by Mexican customers?*

BILL: I'll tell you, LOVE AND ROCKETS appeals to the more mature reader — the guy that is reading AMERICAN

FLAGG, and maybe TWISTED TALES. Now people who buy only LOVE AND ROCKETS — a lot of women are attracted to it. We have a diverse clientele here — there are a lot of Latin Americans and blacks who come into the store.

SHEL: *I've noticed.*

BILL: Also, the kids with the mohawks like AMERICAN FLAGG. It's a very interesting and well-done book. The **Hernandez** brothers have been in the store a number of times, and seem to have a following all their own — very unique, and it crosses a lot of lines. We do get punk kids, adults, and even some of the X-MEN and TEEN TITANS collectors are into it, especially since the color comic has come out. MISTER X and the MECHANICS series have gotten whole new groups of people involved in that book.

SHEL: *Do you feel that the bigger companies that are flooding the market with merchandise are making the marketplace unfair for the independents, or do you think the independents are holding their own?*

BILL: I think that if the independents want to be independents, then they have to exist on their terms. I think that if they have to compete for the buyer's dollar, they have to do it on their own terms. If they want to put out a SUPERMAN or SPIDER-MAN copy, then they have to be prepared to compete on the same terms as DC or Marvel. If they want to put out an AMERICAN FLAGG, then they have to find the market and be able to promote it. I think that although they're part of the same total market, I think it's the responsibility of each one of the publishers to carve out their own niche and to deal with that market, because Marvel will put out five different mini-series, but that should't infringe on the appeal of LOVE AND ROCKETS or AMERICAN FLAGG, for example.

SHEL: *But the books that you buy are non-returnable and I'm sure that you don't have unlimited funds when purchasing these books. Are you giving the independents enough of your own attention?*

BILL: As I said, we've been lucky in that when the independents first started publishing, our clientele latched onto them very quickly, and we sell a lot of the independents — especially in the Melrose store — and so, aside from a very few number of titles, we didn't really get burned — we haven't been burned with the independents. We've had a steady increase in our demand for them. Independents have always had a good place in the store — we've always displayed them

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the beginning we were selling it for 75¢."

well. When they first started, we had an unusual policy — we discounted 20% off all independents, and just to get people aware of them, we put them in a special place in the store, and for about six months at the beginning of '84 we had that policy, that any independent was discounted 20% off the rack and we promoted that quite heavily in the city in order to say, "Look, these people have put out a quality product — sometimes they are more expensive than you're used to paying, and we want to bring down the price." We did that also with DNAGENTS. I've had a running argument with the publishers of DNAGENTS — I've always thought that it should be a 75¢ book, and although it was priced more than that, at the beginning we were selling it for 75¢, because we thought it would have hit the market at which it should have been aimed, and as a result we have a good solid DNAGENTS following, and now that it's gone to 95¢, I look for that to be a...

SHEL: *That's really creative retailing. Do you think there will be more comic-book stores?*

BILL: Quite frankly, no. I think that the future now is to take the people who are serious about becoming retailers and have them develop a real retail sensibility. I think that in the past two or three years we've gotten into a situation where most of the retailers were really obvious, and this was a way to feed their habits or to get something to do, and there were never the expectations of large profits. It's always been — to me, anyway — a seemingly marginal industry and the people who are in it have marginal expectations as to their profitability. However, people like **Steve Geppi** and **John Barrett** and **Buddy Saunders** and people like this around the country have done something else with these stores. They've been into keeping the identity of a comic-book store — the neatness — the terrificness of having all the colors and all the different kinds of things in the stores, have been able to look at this business as a regular retailer would — budgets, forecasts, demographic studies, whatever. We're not going to be selling plumbing fixtures, we're not going to be selling candy and popcorn in the stores, but we're going to get more products that appeal to the people we can attract and build our customer base, build our product base, and be able to survive. I think you're going to see a national chain of comic-book stores emerge, probably in the next two or three years.

SHEL: *Like a McDonalds?*

BILL: Yeah. Once one of the guys I mentioned figures out how to do this thing right and get some formulary and standardization for operating procedures, store sizes, rent, all these other kinds of things — how do we hire and train people? Once we develop that, we're going to see a national chain and that's going to lead to better advertising. Right now, we're making inroads into methods of advertising and how to reach people, and once that catches on and we figure out how to really hit the public — the massive public — I think you'll see a real change. But I think the people that are in the business now are going to be the ones to grow. I don't see a lot of mom-and-pop's growing.

SHEL: *How many years have you been in the business?*

BILL: I've had the store for six years, but I tell people I've been in the business for two-and-a-half years. Before that I was just fooling around, and I would come in on weekends and I was doing other things. But in the last two-and-a-half years, I've really spent time on the business — tried to treat it like a business that I can have fun in. I like nothing better than getting up in the morning and going down and working in the store, wondering how my

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"I'm normal... I have children..."

sales are going to be, but also just seeing what's going to come in the mail that day, and what's in store for us. Even the problems are a lot more fun than anything I have ever experienced in my life.

SHEL: *Terrific. Not everybody can say that.*

BILL: I've done enough things and seen enough businesses to know what I *don't* want to do, and I'm at the stage in my life to where it's been easier to start knocking those things off and whittling it down to the things that I *did* want to do. I've been in high-pressure situations, I've been in extremely laid-back situations, but I've worn a three-piece suit for longer than I care to tell you, and I've spent times on the phone with somebody from the S.E.C. at two in the morning down from the printer getting out a registration statement. This is the most fun and the most job satisfaction I've ever had. I did do one other thing — I worked for the Olympics in '84. I ran the entertainment programs for the Olympic villages.

SHEL: *Oh! Tell us about that. Those were the most successful Olympics that were ever held anywhere.*

BILL: That was one of the most satisfying things I ever did. What I was in charge of was the entertainment programs for the athletes that were in the three Olympic villages, and we set up a night club — a disco in each of the villages and a coffee house kind of arrangement where they could go and have some casual entertainment, and we set up what was the largest film program ever presented in North America. There were over 1200 hours of film and close to 200 feature films. We were the first people to show all three STAR WARS films back-to-back.

SHEL: *Bill, how did you get that job?*

BILL: I asked for it. *(Laughter.)* I went in and talked to **Harry Usher**, and I had some entertainment background. I had managed some groups and I'd done some concert promotion, and he needed someone who knew his way around the record industry, and I had some contacts, and who wasn't afraid to do large promotions. We put on concerts in the villages that no one knew about, because of security reasons. We couldn't tell them that **Joan Jett,** and the **Beach Boys,** and **Herb Alpert** were playing for the athletes. So it was a challenge in advertising that to the athletes — getting them to come to these things, but not letting the general public know about it. In addition to that, we had over seventy performers in the coffee houses and discos ranging from the **Limelighters** to **Don Randy** to **Ernie Watts**, noted jazz musician **Charlie Hayden** — everybody but stand-up comedians, because I didn't want to take a chance on the language barrier. That was a very gratifying and exhausting experience. But I would rank some of the things that I've been able to do in the comic-book store — the job satisfaction and the gratification and the interaction with some of the people is right up there with that.

SHEL: *Do you have any comments about some of the comic-book trade shows that have been happening lately? Do you think this is a good thing?*

BILL: Oh, definitely. I think this is a sign of what we talked about before — the coming of age of the retailers. The theme of these things is, "I'm not afraid to say that I'm a retailer." There's no shame to say that I'm doing this as a business. I don't want to be known as a dealer — a dealer connotes somebody who sells coke and things to kids in alleys — I'm not a dealer, I'm a retailer. And that's the theme of most of these shows. I've been to other retailer conventions and trade shows when I was a C.P.A., and I can say unequivocally that the exchange of ideas and the enthusiasm at the two or three trade shows I've been to is unmatched by anything. I sat until one to two in the morning with people who I had just met that day, exchanging ideas, concepts, numbers for our mutual benefit, with such a free flow in information, I can't believe it. Someone like **John Barrett**, of the Comics and Comix chain, who is head and shoulders ahead of most of the retailers, is so anxious to explain what he's doing, and gathering information from someone else, that just sitting in the same room with John or one of his people is an educational experience, and it's helped me. I hope that some of the flow of information and some of the seminars has helped the other guys. Once we can elevate this out of a dingy, collectors, world, the better off we're going to be. We're going to feel better about what we do, our customers are going to feel better.

SHEL: *And yet you don't want to have a "cold heart" business approach to it either.*

BILL: No, no. My feeling is, deep down inside, most people who collect comic books have been taught that they're doing something wrong, because their mothers threw away their collections or they were ostracized in high school, or their friends who are doctors and attorneys don't understand why they still read SPIDER-MAN. That's not their fault, and they shouldn't be made to feel like they have to go into some place with poor lighting and no air conditioning and no carpeting on the floor to buy the thing that gives them pleasure. I read comics — I'm also married, I have children, I'm a normal kind of person. I want to be treated like a normal person — most of our customers do also.

Robby the Robot, Shel Dorf and Bill Liebowitz. Okay, who's who?

LAST WORD

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COMICS PIONEERS

Dear David:

Congratulations on your array of Batman interviews. It's true that people have conflicting memories after so many years. And of course, **Fred Finger** can only pass along second-hand information which isn't always accurate.

Still, as **Bob Kane** recalls **Bill Finger** as The Joker's creator, and Bill told me it was **Jerry Robinson**'s idea, I think we can accept Jerry as having come up with the concept. Bill found his playing-card drawing too "clownish" and picked the **Conrad Veidt** pic from THE MAN WHO LAUGHS as the model for The Joker.

I'm surprised at one omission in **Kane**'s memories. Bill once told me, "The only villian **Bob Kane** ever created was Two-Face. . . He came up with the idea of a man called Two-Face who would be both good and evil in the same person." According to **Jack Schiff**, the final details were worked out in an editorial conference.

By the way, Jack himself wrote some Batman stories back in the '40s. I know, because I have one of his scripts: a Catwoman story called "Your Face Is Your Fortune."

Bill Finger was indeed a modest, self-effacing man. I once showed him an old Batman story — the Witch tale from WORLD'S BEST #1 — and asked if he had written it. He said, "At that time, it must have been either me or **Don Cameron**." Then he read some of it and said, "It must have been me. **Don Cameron** never wrote this badly."

And it's obvious he got much inspiration from the pulps. I wish I'd known, while he was still with us, about the secret identity of The Whisperer: New York Police Commissioner James "Wildcat" Gordon. I'd like to know if that was the origin of Batman's Commissioner James W. Gordon.

According to Bill, **Garner Fox** wrote the two-part story of The Monk, the villain who turned out to be a vampire. This was an experiment to see whether supernatural horror would work with Batman, and apparently it didn't — at that time, anyway. What's notable is that it introduced Bruce's first love interest (Julie Madison), the Batarangs (spelled Baterang) and the first Batplane (the Batgiro).

As I understand it, Bill first worked with Bob on "Rusty and His Pals" in ADVANTURE COMICS. It was a sort of humorous adventure strip.

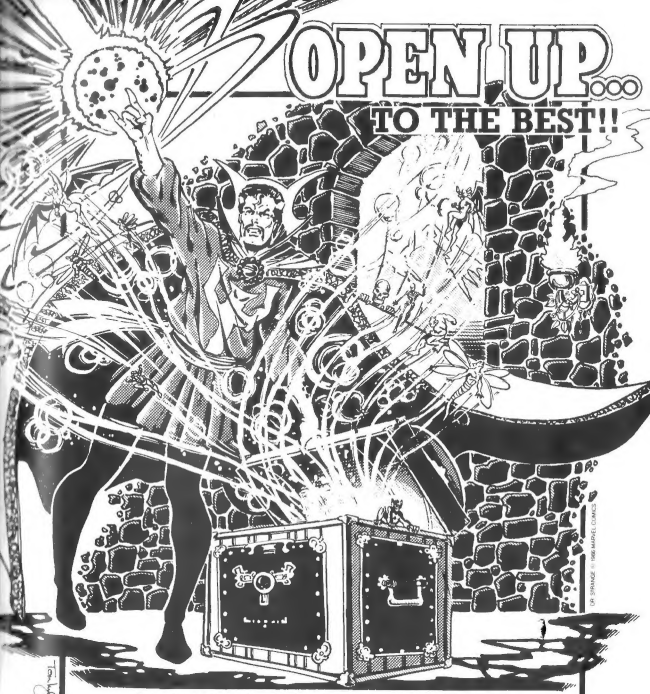
Concerning Robin, Bill told me he wasn't sure whether Bob or Jerry came up with the idea; Jerry said it was either Bob or Bill, he wasn't sure which. That left Bob as undisputed creator of Robin. There may still be differences over who named him, though not the origin of the name: Robin Hood, as all agree. Jerry was quick to squelch the rumor that the Boy Wonder was named after him. Also, both he and Bill recalled coming up with the Robin Hood-like costume concept; according to Bill, the first sketch looked too much like a junior-sized Batman.

Originally, Batman wore no gloves. Then, shortly after he debuted, a pulp hero called The Black Bat showed up. Bill considered him a rip-off of Batman, but liked what looked like gloves in the illustrations. So Batman's gauntlets were added. "They stole our character, so we stole their gloves," Bill said.

I wish all the comics pioneers would write their memoirs. At least, interviews like yours are the next best thing.

E. Nelson Bridwell
DC Comics Inc
666 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10103

NEXT ISSUE: Writer/artist and husband/wife team WALT & WEEZIE SIMONSON x-amine the all new X-FACTOR! And MR. X's uncanny mentor, DEAN MOTTER, divulges secrets of his drug-free existence! Daves DARRIGO & ROSS come in out of the cold in Canada with WORDSMITH & ALPHA FLIGHT! Plenty more in COMICS INTERVIEW #39 — an X-travaganza of an issue — watch for the Wolverine/Mr. X cover!



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